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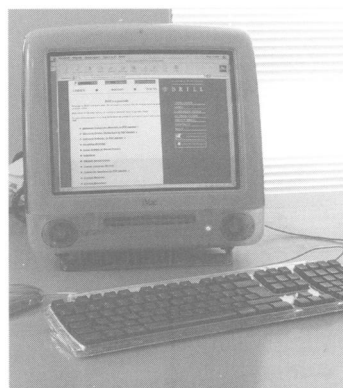
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ON HINDU, HINDUSTĀN, HINDUISM AND HINDUTVA

ARVIND SHARMA

Summary

This paper sets out to examine the emergence and significance of the word Hindu (and associated terminology) in discourse about India, in order to determine the light it sheds on what is currently happening in India. It concludes that the word, and its derivatives, contain a series of semantic bivalences characterised by unresolved tensions, and further that these tensions help account for the complexities generated by the induction of the word Hindu (and associated terminology) in modern Indian political discourse.

Hindū (P) n.m. A native of India; a negro; a black Arabian, Indian or Ethiopian; a Gentoo (Hindu); a slave; a thief. *adj.* black.

Hindustān (P) n.m. India; the country of Hindus.

(*Ferozsons Urdu-English Dictionary:
A Comprehensive Dictionary of Current Vocabulary*
[Karachi: Ferozsons, n.d.] p. 821.)

The word Hindu (with allied formations such as Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva) has come to possess a unique valence in the context of India, a valence denied to such words as India, *Bhārata*, *Āryadeśa*, or *Madhyadeśa* (as synonyms of Hindustān; see W.C. Smith 1962:256; Takakusu 1966:118; Wink 1990, 1:288; Nehru 1946:49); *Āryadharma*, *Sanātana Dharma* or just *Dharma* (as equivalents of Hinduism; see Jaffrelot 1996:18; Stietencron 1989:15; Renou 1953:48) and Indianness, or *Hindutā* (as an option for *Hindutva*; see Lipner 1996:112–113; Nalapat 1999).

Why?

I

Arguably the earliest traceable use of the word Hindu appears in the Zend Avesta (Jackson 1922:324–325):

The first chapter of the Avestan Vendīdād (whatever may be the age of the chapter) contains an allusion to a portion of Northern India in a list which it gives of sixteen lands or regions, created by Ahur Mazda and apparently regarded as under Irānian sway. The fifteenth of these domains, according to Vd. 1, 18 was Hapta Hindu, ‘Seven Rivers’, a region of ‘abnormal heat’, probably identical with the territory of Sapta Sindhavas, ‘Seven Rivers’, in the Veda (see especially Rv. VIII, 24, 27).

A tension between two significations of the term Hindu is already reflected in the two explanations offered of this occurrence. George Thompson (1999) has recently argued that the imprecations of the non-believers found in both Avesta and the ṚgVeda may actually reflect the religious differences of the two communities at the time, an interpretation which already imparts to the term a religious flavour. On the other hand, a Sassanian commentary imparts a political-territorial ring to it: “The Seven Hindukān; the expression ‘Seven Hindukān’ is due to this fact, that the over-lordship (*sar-xūtāi*) is seven; and therefore I do not say ‘Seven Rivers,’ for that is manifest from the Avesta [passage] . . .” (Jackson 1922:324).

One of the earliest datable, as distinguished from traceable, references to the word Hindu again comes from Persia, with the rise of the Achaemenid Empire (H.W. Rawlinson 1954:53–54). An inscription of Darius I which is “considered to have been carved between c. 518 and 515 BC, adds Hidu [Hindu] to the list of subject countries” (Raychaudhuri 1996:584). Similarly, clay tablets from Persepolis, in Elamite, “datable to different years from the thirteenth to the twenty-eighth regnal year of Darius” mention Hi-in-tu (India) (*ib.* 585). These examples, establishing the primacy of the territorial meaning, are confirmed by Herodotus (*Historiae* III, 91, 94, 98–102) in his employment of the word as ‘Indoi’ in Greek, which, “lacking an alphabetic character of the sound of h, did not in this case preserve it” (Narayanan 1996:14). He is preceded by Hecataeus (520 BC), as the “first to mention India among surviving Greek writers” (H.G. Rawlinson 1980 [1913]:205).

There is evidence that Xerxes (486–465 BC), son and successor of Darius, “destroyed a sanctuary of the *Daivas*” or false divinities according to the Persian concept (Raychaudhuri 1996:586), but this sanctuary was situated not in Hi-in-tu (Hindu or lower Indus region) but in Gandhāra (*ib.* 586):

One of the newly discovered stone-tablets at Persepolis records that Xerxes “By Ahuramazda’s will” sapped the foundations of certain temples of the *Daivas* and ordained that “the *Daivas* shall not be worshipped”. Where the *Daivas* had been worshipped, the king worshipped Ahuramazda together with *Ṛtam* (divine world order). ‘India’ may have been among the lands which witnessed the outcome of the religious zeal of the Persian king.

This ‘India’ was still confined to Sind, for it was under Xerxes that “for the first time in history an Indian expeditionary force fought on the soil of Europe” and even stormed the “bloody defiles of Thermopylae.” The ‘Indian’ recruits to the army were called by two names: “Gandharians and Indians,” thereby confirming that while the former were “from the province of Gandhāra” (listed as a separate province), the *Indians* were “from the provinces controlled by the Persian empire to the east of the Sindhu and described as *Sindhu* in the Achaemenian inscriptions” (Mukherji 1951:42).

The word Hindu derives, by common consent, from the word Sindhu. It is remarkable that the direction of transformation of Sindhu → Hindu → Ind is paralleled in the account of the Buddhist pilgrim Xanzuang (= Hiuen Tsang, 7th century), by the words Shin-tu → Hien-tau → Tien-chu, and even more surprising that it becomes In-tu, at which point its connotation overflows into the religious, at least in Xanzuang’s interpretation of it (Beal 1969 [1884]:69):

Names of India

On examination, we find that the names of India (Tien-chu) are various and perplexing as to their authority. It was anciently called Shin-tu, also Hien-tau; but now, according to the right pronunciation, it is called In-tu. The people of In-tu call their country by different names according to their district. Each country has diverse customs. Aiming at a general name which is the best sounding, we will call the country In-tu. In Chinese this name signifies the Moon. The moon has many names, of which this is one. For as it is said that all living things ceaselessly

revolve in the wheel (*of transmigration*) through the long night of ignorance, without a guiding star, their case is like (*the world*), the sun gone down; as then the torch affords its connecting light, though there be the shining of the stars, how different from the bright (*cool*) moon; just so the bright connected light of holy men and sages, guiding the world as the shining of the moon, have made this country eminent, and so it is called In-tu.

The successor pilgrim I-tsing, however, remarks: "Some say Indu means the moon, and the Chinese name for India, i.e., Indu, is derived from it; although it may mean this, it is, nevertheless, not the common name" (Takakusu 1966:118).

As one concludes this rapid survey of the word Hindu in the ancient period it is worth contrasting the different semantic destinies of the same word in the east and the west. Sindhu becomes 'India' in Greek, acquiring a purely territorial reference never compromised once acquired, but in the east it becomes Indu in Chinese, in the process acquiring a religious ambience.

II

Thus in the ancient world the formations from the original word, Sindhu, bifurcated semantically along different lines, as the word travelled to the west and the east. In its Persian and Greek acceptance the word became a signifier of a region (which was restricted to the lower Indus in the case of the early Persians and extended to cover the whole of India in the case of the Greeks). In its Chinese acceptance it possessed a religious dimension as explained by Xanxuang. When India came in contact with Arabia, and later the Islamic world, the same word, Sindhu, again gave rise to two words, whose meanings became both more distinct and more settled when compared to the usages of the ancient world, crystallizing as Hind (through Sind) to denote the land of India and Hindu (from Sindhu) to denote the follower of a 'religion' (though not without some overlap, as discussed later).

The first use preceded the second. India was known as al-Hind in pre-Islamic Arabia (Wink 1990, 1:195–6), and consequently the word Hindu simply meant an Indian until it acquired a religious connotation (B.N. Sharma 1972:128). Even after the word Hindu had acquired

a religious connotation, it continued to be used as a synonym for an Indian in some parts of the world. In fact, according to Wilfred Cantwell Smith the “use of *Hindu* in the meaning ‘Indian’ survived in popular English into the twentieth century; I can remember as a boy that in Canada we discriminated red Indians from Hindu [i.e. Indian] Indians; and, I have heard the phrase a ‘Hindu Muslim’ as distinguished from an Arab or a Turkish Muslim” (1962:256; also see Lorenzen 1995:12). This need not surprise as the word *Sindhu* originally had a geographical referent, and one’s interest now must focus on when and how it managed to acquire a religious signification.

The use of the word *Hindu* in this sense can be dated with some precision. It begins with the Arab invasion of Sindh by Muhammad ibn Qāsim in 712. “The administrative arrangements which Muhammad ibn Qasim made with the non-Muslims after his victory over Dahar are often referred to as ‘the Brahmanabad settlement.’ The basic principle was to treat the Hindus as ‘people of the book’ and to confer on them the status of *zimmis* (the protected)” (Ikram 1964:11). The Hindus now were a people who followed a religion other than Islam. Right here the word displays an ambiguity which it retains to this day, namely, its unresolved relation with the Buddhists. For when Hajjāj, Muhammad ibn Qāsim’s ambitious father-in-law and viceroy of the western provinces, approved the request for repairing a damaged temple, he refers to the fact of being petitioned by the chief inhabitants of Brahmanabad “to be allowed to repair the temple of Budh and to pursue their religion” (Ikram 1964:11). Is the Budh here the same as Buddha? In any case, while it is true that both ‘Hindus’ and ‘Buddhists’ would be *zimmis* regardless, did he know the difference? It is also worth noting that according to “one early Muslim historian, the Arab conqueror countenanced even the privileged position of the Brahmans, not only in religious matters but also in the administrative sphere” (Ikram 1964:11). The significance of the Arab conquest of Sind for the subsequent history of India, as recounted in the following passage, is also of significance for our exercise.

The conquest of Sind by Muhammad ibn Qāsim, and the incorporation of that province into the Muslim universal caliphate, brought the Hindus and the

Muslims there in a relationship of a very different nature, that of the ruled and the ruler. This form of political relationship, which some centuries later extended to the whole sub-continent, and survived until well into the eighteenth century inevitably led to the creation of tensions which determined very largely the psychological course of the history of medieval and modern India. (Ahmad 1964:77).

Not only is the Hindu now identified on a religious basis, conversion *from* this Hindu religion now becomes possible. It has been asserted, for instance, that Muhammad ibn Qāsim's "boldest innovation was the appointment of Sīskar, the former minister of his vanquished adversary Rājā Dāhir, as his adviser after Sīskar had accepted Islam" (Ahmad 1964:101). Collaboration with non-Hindu rulers also became possible, as illustrated by the case of Kaksa, Rājā Dāhir's nephew. According to an early historian, he "was a learned man and a philosopher of Hind. When he came to transact business, Muhammad ibn Qasim used to make him sit before the throne and then consult him, and Kaksa took precedence in the army before all the nobles and commanders. He collected the revenue of the country and the treasury was placed under his seal. He assisted Muhammad ibn Qasim in all his undertakings, and was addressed by the title of mubarak mushir (prosperous counsellor)" (Ikram 1964:10–11).

And if Muhammad ibn Qāsim also "married Rani Ladi, Dahar's widow, thus becoming the master of Lower Sind" (*ib.* 7), then a pattern of Hindu-Muslim interaction was put in place which became archetypal in some ways, with profound implications for the meaning of the word Hindu, although Islamic rule over Sind did not long survive Muhammad ibn Qāsim's death (Majumdar 1970:172).

It is when we reach the next phase of Islamic contact with India that a major divide surfaces. As Narayani Gupta (1999:103–104) notes: "It is fashionable to criticize Mill, but to most Indians, precolonial India has two pasts (Mill's 'Hindu' and 'Islamic' civilizations) and the attack on Somnath by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1025 has the same emotive significance as the Turks conquest of Constantinople in 1453 had for conventional European history." Thus in the time of Maḥmūd of Ghazna (r. 998–1030) the word Hindu continued on its religious

semantic journey. According to Percival Spear, Maḥmūd's conquests "set up in Indian minds a tradition of Muslim intolerance. In the popular Hindu mind [from now on] a Muslim was as intolerant as a *Bania* was avaricious or a Rajput brave. Perhaps the chance of the ultimate conversion of India to Islam was lost in the din of Mahmud's idol-breaking" (1972:103–4). This, however, tells us more about the evolving meaning of Islam for the Hindu, than the evolving meaning of the term Hindu. For that we have to turn to the famous scholar Albīrūnī (973–1048) who was patronised by Maḥmūd and who refers to Hindus as "our religious antagonists" (Sachau 1914, 1:7) in the preface of his much lauded book on India. In the book itself, however, he aimed to describe what he observed "phenomenologically," as we would call it now, so that one could "discuss with [the Hindus] questions of religion, science, or literature, on the very basis of their own civilization" (1914, 2:246).

Albīrūnī's account is intriguing. We find him wrestling with issues which bedevil the study of Hinduism to this day. To cite only a few: (1) What was the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism? Albīrūnī distinguishes between the two (1:40, 121, 249, 326) but he does not fail to note that the Buddhists are closer to the Hindus than the Muslims. He writes in a striking passage (1:21, emphasis added; also see Mukherji 1961:22–23):

Another circumstance which increased the already existing antagonism between Hindus and foreigners is that the so-called Shamaniyya (*Buddhists*), *though they cordially hate Brahmans, still are nearer akin to them than to others. In former times, Khurāsān, Persis, Irāk, Mosul, the country up to the frontier of Syria, was Buddhistic*, but then Zarathustra went forth from Ādharbaijān and preached Magism in Balkh (Baktra). His doctrine came into favour with King Gushtasp, and his son Isfendiyād spread the new faith both in east and west, both by force and by treaties. He founded fire-temples through his whole empire, from the frontiers of China to those of the Greek empire. The succeeding kings made their religion (*i.e.* Zoroastrianism) the obligatory state-religion for Persis and Irāk. In consequence, the Buddhists were banished from those countries and had to emigrate to the countries east of Balkh.

(2) Who speaks for Hinduism? According to Albīrūnī "the main and most essential point of the Hindu world of thought is that which

Brahmans think and believe, for they are specifically trained for preserving and maintaining their religion. And this is what we shall explain, viz. the belief of the Brahmans” (Sachau 1914, 1:39). It is clear that who speaks for Hinduism was an issue then as it is now, although Albīrūnī chose to resolve it in his own way. (3) Is Hinduism a creedal or an ethnic religion? Albīrūnī *describes* Hinduism with gusto but when it come to defining it there are problems. At one point he veers towards a creedal definition (1:50):

As the word of confession, “There is no god but God, Muhammad is his prophet,” is the shibboleth of Islam, the Trinity that of Christianity, and the institute of the Sabbath that of Judaism, so metempsychosis is the shibboleth of the Hindu religion. Therefore he who does not believe in it does not belong to them, and is not reckoned as one of them.

But did Albīrūnī not know that the Buddhists also believed in it? So here we are back to the problem of the fluid boundaries. The situation is even more complex, for his description clearly testifies to the internal diversity of Hinduism. One often encounters such expressions as: “Some Hindus believe . . .”; “others hold the more traditional view that . . .”; “Hindus differ among themselves . . .”; “some Hindus maintain . . ., according to others . . .”; “the common people describe these things . . ., the educated Hindus do not share these opinions”; “some Hindus say . . ., others have told me . . .”; “if we now pass from the ideas of the educated people among the Hindus to those of the common people, we must first state that they present a great variety . . .”; etc. (1:61, 63, 82, 104, 175, 176, 324; 2:152, 31).

Albīrūnī seems to be oscillating between what Richard H. Davis has described as centralist and pluralist views of approaching Hinduism *already*. In terms of this distinction (Davis 1995:6):

Centrists identify a single, pan-Indian, more or less hegemonic, orthodox tradition, transmitted primarily in Sanskrit language, chiefly by members of the brahmanic class. The tradition centers around a Vedic lineage of texts, in which are included not only the Vedas themselves, but also the Mīmāṃsā, Dharmasāstra, and Vedānta corpuses of texts and teachings. Vedic sacrifice is the privileged mode of ritual conduct, the template for all subsequent Indian ritualism. Various groups employing vernacular languages in preference to Sanskrit, questioning

the caste order, and rejecting the authority of the Vedas, may periodically rebel against this center, but the orthodox, through an adept use of inclusion and repressive tolerance, manage to hold the high ground of religious authority.

On the other hand (1995:6–7):

The pluralists, by contrast, envision a decentered profusion of ideas and practices all tolerated and incorporated under the big tent of Hinduism. No more concise statement of this view can be found than that of the eminent Sanskrit scholar J.A.B. van Buitenen in the 1986 *Encyclopedia Britannica*: “In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. The Hindu is inclined to revere the divinity in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and is doctrinally tolerant . . . Hinduism is, then, both a civilization and a conglomeration of religions, with neither a beginning, a founder, nor a central authority, hierarchy, or organization.”

The usage of the word Hindu in the subsequent period retains the two ambiguities (1) whether it refers to a region or a religion and (2) whether, as religion, it is to be understood in a centralist or pluralist manner. Thus during the Delhi Sultanate (c. 1200–1526) the word Hindu, on the one hand, denoted a religion, on the other, a region, and it imprints this ambivalence on geography, if the Arabian traveller Ibn Battūta is to be believed. He states that Hindu Kush (“Hindu-killer”) became known as such “because of the number of Indian slaves who perished in passing” (*Enc. Brit.* 1967, 11:514; H.G. Rawlinson 1980 [1913]:193) its snows. Would these Indian slaves not have been mostly Hindu?

By the time the Delhi Sultanate was replaced by the Moghul Empire, after it had been consolidated by Akbar the Great (r. 1556–1605), the question of defining Hinduism once again began to pose the kind of problems it has before and since. A well-known text of this period is the *Dabistān-i-maẓāhib*, which attempts an overview of the religious landscape of the empire. Irfan Habib writes (Joshi and Josh 1994, 3:185):

There were the religious traditions coming from ancient India, which by Mughal times began to be described under the term ‘Hindu’. The author of *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* is hard put to describe what the beliefs of a Hindu are and ultimately he takes shelter in a very convenient position—Hindus are those who have

been arguing with each other within the same framework of argument over the centuries. If they recognise each other as persons whom we can either support or oppose in a religious argument, then both parties are Hindus. The Jains, although they rejected Brahmanism, were still Hindus because they were arguing and polemicising with Brahmins. Such arguments were not taking place between Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims did not share any basic terminology with the others. Muslims had their own framework, an ideological framework, the semitic framework . . .

It is necessary to introduce a broader consideration at this point, which will prove to be of lasting significance. Although one is accustomed to looking at the Indian historical reality in terms of a Hindu-Muslim polarity, this must always be tempered with a recognition of the pluralism which characterised India. There were always many castes and kingdoms, and after *c.* 1000, just as there could be castes which are not Hindu, so too there could be kingdoms which were not Hindu. But just as the broad framework of multiple castes could accommodate aberrations or deviations or exceptions, so could the multiple kingdoms accommodate the new Muslim kingdoms, thereby continuing rather than replacing the tradition of “intense militarism of ancient [pre-Muslim] India” (Basham 1967:123). It is perhaps worth comparing the situation in India with that in China here and to recognize that “Sanskritization differs from sinicization in that it is a more pluralistic, less unitary process” (Rudolph 1987:741).

The social pluralism of caste and the political pluralism of multiple kingdoms also played off each other to produce the same outcome all the more. The significance of the following fascinating details passes beyond the level of the anecdotal in this light: that the “iconoclast Mahmūd of Ghazana permitted image worship to his Hindu subjects in their separate quarters in his own capital” (Ahmad 1964:90), and “at least three Hindu generals, Sundar, Nath, and Tilak rose to positions of high responsibility in the Ghazanawid army” (101); and that while Fīrūz Tughluq pursued theocratic policies “his bodyguard consisted of Rājputs headed by Bhīrū Bhattī, a relative of his mother” (102). It is not being claimed either that the Hindu and Muslim communities had evolved into or towards a single culture, nor is the opposite

being claimed—that they remained poles apart beneath a veneer of accord. The claim is much more modest—that the social, political and religious pluralism of the Indian reality allowed for a certain measure of permeability, malleability and fluidity which may have been *subsequently* lost (Sarkar 1996:277–278).

The problem of boundaries with respect to Hindu religion in general is a difficult one and seems to become more so “during ‘early medieval’ or ‘late medieval’/‘early modern’ periods, areas which are the battle ground between conventional and progressive historians” in India now-a-days. On numerous occasions Hindus and Muslims are *not* distinguished as such, while communities within them are, during the ‘early medieval period’ (Chattopadhyaya 1998). The predicaments of the ‘early Modern’ period in this regard are best indicated by the headache the “35,000-strong community of ‘Hindu-Muhammadans’ in Gujarat” caused for the Bombay census superintendent as late as 1911, on account of its “inextricable combination of multiple practices, beliefs, and even self-definitions. The latter was pulled up sharply by his superior, census commissioner E.A. Gait, who ordered the location of the ‘persons concerned to the one or the other as best as he could’” (Sarkar 1999:1694). Harjot S. Oberoi has drawn pointed attention to this aspect of fluid religious loyalties in the “early Modern” period (1994; 1988:136–158), which William H. Sleeman experienced first hand in 1849 when he passed through Bahraich. He thought it “strange” that Hindus should revere the “Muslim” shrine there of Sayyid Salār as much as the Muslims: “All our Hindu camp followers paid as much reverence to the shrine as they passed as the Mahomedans ... The Hindoos worshipped any sign of manifested might or power, though exerted against themselves” (Wink 1990, 2:133).

The point then is that, in the pre-1900 period, lateral accommodation of non-Hindu elements in general and Muslims in particular was possible at the social and political levels. Moreover, these traditions themselves—the Hindu and Muslim—were plural in nature, a fact which further coincided with the process and furthered it.

Such accommodation was no longer possible after a point under British rule (Hansen 1999:29ff) because of simultaneous development of the concept of *nation* and of monolithic *religions*. The first development meant that political differences based on religion could not be accommodated regionally. Given the emergent concept of a nation they had to be dealt with at the national level, in the singular. Moreover, the monolithisation of the Hindu and Islamic traditions closed off the fissures of adjustment between them socially and locally, and made them face, and then confront, each other as single consolidated entities. The rules by which the game had to be played now were radically altered, both in terms of the players and the playing field (Kolff 1990; Jaffrelot 1996; Baylay 1985; Sarkar 1996; Lele 1995; Jones 1981).

III

It is important to interrupt the discussion of the religious significance of the word Hindu (to be resumed later) to cast a glance at another word which had by now come into play, namely, *Hindustān*. As we do so, we might do well to recognise that in the word Hindu we confronted two ambiguities (or a double ambiguity): (1) whether it signifies a geographical or a religious referent, and (2) if it denotes a religion then, what constitutes it?

The word *Hindustān* may well serve as a metaphor of the first ambiguity. The word literally means 'the land of the Hindus' (Nag and Burman 1947, 1:1) and had become a common word for India, specially north India, by the thirteenth century. It raises the natural query: how is the word Hindu to be taken here: as a resident of a geographical region (Wink 1990, 1:125) or as the follower of a particular faith; or as the resident of a particular region who is *also* the follower of a particular faith (Sreenivasan 1989–133)? All these senses are possible because of the tremendous demographic overlap between the two categories. Ultimately the meaning remains unclear. One might initially think that an allusion to a 'place' (*stān*) in the word itself would orient its meaning geographically. This is indeed so (Basham 1967:1–2; Nehru 1946:335) but the significance continues to remain double-edged, for it could be taken to mean either the

abode of ‘Indians’ (Frykenberg 1989:31), or the abode of the Hindus (Monier-Williams 1960:1298). This statement could be made either descriptively or pejoratively, depending on how one felt about the Hindus (Mujeeb 1967:331). It has been used in all these senses (and even for undivided India) (Nehru 1946, 543).

We are not done yet with the word, for in its adjectival form (as *Hindustanī*) it opens up another vista of meaning. If one sense of the word Hindustān includes all Indians and another Hindus, then in its adjectival form it seems to reach out for a sense which reconciles both, and specially Hindus with Muslims. This is most obvious in the pre-Partition proposal that India’s *lingua franca* be Hindustani which steers a middle course between a Sanskritising Hindi, and a Persianising and Arabising Urdu, as the language of the undivided subcontinent. In this sense of happy compromise the word seems to go back a few centuries. Bābur, for instance, even thought that the Indians—Hindus and Muslims together, had evolved their own way of living together with each other by the time the foundations of the Moghul Empire were laid by him in India. He called it the Hindustani way (Shrivastava 1981:12)!

IV

If we wish to connect this hitherto historical discussion of the terms Hindu (and Hindustān) with first modern and then contemporary developments in India, then one crucial question needs to be asked in order to make this transition; when did the ‘Hindus’ themselves begin to use the word self-referentially (granting that the word Hindu is not a Hindu word)?

The key question then is: when did the Hindus start using the word Hindu for themselves?

Such usage begins to emerge at least by the sixteenth century, as pointed out by Joseph T. O’Connell (1973:340–343). But R.E. Frykenberg observes (1989:30):

But here it appears only in texts describing episodes of strained relationships between Hindus as natives and Muslims as foreigners (“Yavanas” or “Mlecchas”). The term, we are told, was never used by Hindus among themselves to describe

themselves; moreover, the term “Hindu dharma” which occurs seven times, four times in Bengali texts, was only used in the same way and never with any explicit definition or discussion of what “Hindu” or “Hindu dharma” itself meant. “Hindu dharma,” therefore, is the closest resemblance to the term “Hinduism” which can be found to have arisen out of indigenous sources within India.

It is however possible to identify the self-use of the word Hindu in an even earlier period.

It is clear that by the sixteenth century ‘Hindus’ were referring to themselves as Hindus. Ekanath (1548–1600) writes: “If I call myself a Hindu I will be beaten up, and Muslim I am not” (*Hindu Kahan ta mariya, muslaman bhee nahe*) (Joshi and Josh 1994, 3:189). Earlier on, several rulers of Vijayanagar had taken the “title *Hindurāya-suratrāṇa* ‘Sultan of the Hindu kings’ in imitation of the sultans of Madurai and the Bahmani sultans” (Scharfe 1989:79). More precisely, it occurs in five inscriptions from the reign of Bukka (r. 1344–1377) (Wagoner 1996:861–862) and its use can also be traced, in four cases, by kings of Vijayanagara’s fourth and last dynasty (the Aravidu, c. 1570–1649) with another five uses in the intervening period, including some by Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509–1529) (*ib.* 862 n.8). In some inscriptions of Bukka the prefix Hindu is also dropped (*ib.* 863). Thus beginning with 1352 the title, in “one form or another . . . continued in use by Bukka’s successors for at least . . . 250 years, through three changes in dynasty” (*ib.* 862).

The expression is not entirely free from ambiguity but it is generally accepted that *suratrāṇa* is a Sanskritised form of Islamic ‘Sultan.’ According to Vasundhara Filliozat it is a “title which would have been given to Bukka by his Muslim neighbours” (Wagoner 1996:862). According to Hermann Kulke, it seems likely that “the early kings of Vijayanagar laid claim to a status among the Hindu Rajas equal to that of Sultans among the Muslim rulers” (*ib.* 862). Phillip B. Wagoner is prepared to make a stronger claim and suggests that “both titles ‘Sultan’ and ‘Sultan among the Hindu Kings’ were used in a much more literal and direct [rather than homological] sense as a means of proclaiming that the Vijayanagara ruler could actually be considered a Sultan, not in terms of relative political understanding, but in concrete terms of

substance and style. In particular, the title *hindurāya-suratrāṇa* would have served to differentiate its bearer from ordinary Hindu (i.e. Indic) kings signaling his willingness to participate in the political discourse of Islamic civilization” (*ib.* 862). Wagoner, however, renders Hindu as Indic consistently with his view that the Hindu vs. Muslim rhetoric in the historiography of the Vijayanagar empire has been overdone (*ib.* 851–852). This may well be so and the issue takes us to the heart of the matter if we formulate the issue as follows: how is *Hindu* in the expression *Hindurāya-suratrāṇa* to be understood? Wagoner focuses on *suratrāṇa*, we need to focus on the word *Hindu*. Is this Hindu here as in ‘Indian’ or as in “follower of Hinduism,” an ambiguity encountered earlier in the Persian word *Hindustān* (W.C. Smith 1962:256) for India: does it mean the land of the Indians or of Hindus? Is it that outsiders (Persians) use it in the first sense (*ibid.*) but Indians themselves *also* in the second, as when one might say describe the partition of India as the division of *Hindustān* into *Pākistān* and *Hindustān*? Here a reversal is encountered. Pakistanis may take *Hindustān* to mean *both* the land of Indians and of Hindus simultaneously but Indians would, in that case, use it only in the former sense for Indians, inclusive of both Hindus and Muslims as both inhabit present day *Hindustān*.

In a sense, therefore, the issue remains with us but in another sense it is resolved. Hindus are clearly using the word to refer to themselves, although whether they are using it to refer to themselves geographically, culturally, or religiously may not be entirely unproblematic. Nevertheless, that there is a religious component in the situation, while it could be exaggerated (W.C. Smith 1962:257) cannot be denied. One may propose that by the fourteenth century the use of the word Hindu did include an element of Hindu self-consciousness.

The case of Shivaji (1627–1680) in relation to the Moghul Empire provides an interesting example. King Akbar (r. 1556–1605) firmly established Moghul rule over India. He was known as *Pādshāh* and his rule as *Pādshāhī*. Historians have described Shivaji’s life’s mission in similar terms, as one of establishing a Hindu *pādshāhī* (Sardesai 1974:263). In a letter written in 1646 A.D. Shivaji describes his earnest desire (*manoratha*) to establish a *Hindavi Svarajya* (Savarkar

1969:57). Was Shivaji aiming to establish Hindu self-rule or Indian self-rule? Or was it the case that, as the opponent was perceived as foreigner both by lineage and religion, there was no need to draw such a distinction?

Our task on hand, however, is not to try to answer these questions but *to note that the ambiguity in relation to the word Hindu persists when 'Hindus' themselves start to use this term.* And both the ambiguities persist: it is not always clear whether the connotation is geographical or religious, and it is not always clear what comprises 'Hinduism,' if the reference in terms of faith happens to be unambiguous. Richard King notes (1999:162):

Although indigenous use of the term by Hindus themselves can be found as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, its usage was derivative of Persian Muslim influences and did not represent anything more than a distinction between 'indigenous' or 'native' and foreign (*mleccha*). For instance, when Belgian Thierry Verhelst interviewed an Indian intellectual from Tamil Nadu he recorded the following interchange,

Q: Are you a Hindu?

A: No, I grew critical of it because of casteism . . . Actually, you should not ask people if they are Hindu. This does not mean much. If you ask them what their religion is, they will say, "I belong to this caste."

He goes on to say (*ib.* 163):

Indeed, it is clear that the term "Hindu," even when used by the indigenous Indian, did not have the specifically religious connotations which it subsequently developed under Orientalist influences until the nineteenth century. Thus, eighteenth century references to "Hindoo" Christians or "Hindoo" Muslims were not uncommon. As Romila Thapar points out in her discussion of the reception of Muslims into India, "The people of India do not seem to have perceived the new arrivals as a unified body of Muslims. The name 'Muslim' does not occur in the records of the early contacts. The term used was either ethnic, *turuska*, referring to the Turks, or geographical, Yavana, or cultural, *mleccha*." One should also note the distinctively negative nature of the term, the primary function of which it to provide a catch-all designation for the "Other," whether negatively contrasted with the ancient Persians, with their Muslim descendants, or with the later European Orientalists who eventually adopted the term. Indeed the same is apparent from an examination of modern India law. For example the 1955 Hindu

Marriage Act, section 2 (1) defines a 'Hindu' as a category including not only all Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs but also anyone who is not a Muslim, Christian, a Parsee or a Jew. Thus even in the contemporary context the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' are essentially negative appellations, functioning as an all-inclusive rubric for the non-Judeo-Christian 'other.'

V

Despite this lack of clarity (or because of it) the word Hindu, after a brief period of flirtation with other words (Marshall 1970), was adopted by the British to "characterize *all things in India* (specially elements and features found in the cultures and religions of India) which were *not* Muslim, *not* Christian, *not* Jewish, or, hence, *not* Western" (Frykenberg 1989:31).

It is now time to pause and take stock before we venture into the British period. By examining the history of the word Hindu, and its usage, it becomes obvious that the word did not come into common use until after 1000 AD. During this pre-1000 period India represented a single politico-religio-cultural entity (Pande 1984:170; Spear 1972:93). Subsequently its use gradually spread in such a way that by the eighteenth century it became a common locution often used by both insiders and outsiders (W.C. Smith 1962:70) to denote a religio-cultural complex which was distinct from, also different from and sometimes diametrically opposed to the Islamic presence.

In religio-cultural terms itself, the presence of another religio-cultural complex now also characterised the land, namely, the Islamic. The British presence in India introduced another religio-cultural complex on top of it, namely, Western/Christian. Up to a point, the British presence in India could almost be considered benignly neutral, if not actually pro-Hindu, from a Hindu perspective. It has even been plausibly argued that "the Company's Raj was actually, for most intents and purposes, a *de facto* 'Hindu Raj'" (Frykenberg 1989:34).

By this, I meant several things:—that the Raj, as an imperial system of rule, was a genuinely indigenous rather than simply a foreign (or "colonial") construct; that, hence, it was more Indian than British in its inner logic, regardless of external interferences and violations of that logic by Britain (especially during the Crown period of this Raj); that, in terms of religious institutions, indigenous elites and

local forces of all kinds were able to receive recognition and protection, as well as special concessions, from the State; and, moreover, that they had been able to do this in direct proportion to their ability—whether by power of information control, numbers, noise, skill or wealth—to influence local governments.

A breach opens up after 1818, the year in which both the Maratha Confederacy was defeated, thereby eliminating the last major challenge to British paramountcy in India and also the year in which James Mill published his famous multi-volume work clinically entitled *The History of British India*, which was really a phillipic against Hinduism (Davis 1995:46).

Mill's *History*, an immense and thorough indictment for the Indian peoples, tried to justify the need for British rule among a population supposedly unable to govern itself. Mill especially condemned Hinduism blaming it for much of what was wrong with India. Hinduism is ritualistic, superstitious, irrational, and priest-ridden, Mill charged, at each step implicitly contrasting it with the deist version of Christianity that he believed to be the highest form of religion. For several decades the East India Company provided a copy of Mill's tome to new Company officials embarking for India, to sustain them in their sense of racial and cultural superiority while in the colony.

Thus after an initial phase of Hindu sympathy the ruler-ruled relationship came to the fore, basically affecting if not warping the reception of this Western/Christian religio-cultural complex as well.

It is not as widely recognised as it should be that the 1818–1857 period was characterised by an intense effort to convert India, or, at least the Indian army, to Christianity (although the “farcical episode of the return of the supposed gates of Somnath from Ghazni” during the first Afghan War under Lord Ellenborough also falls during this period), an ambition that was only abandoned when the Indian Mutiny raised the stakes forbiddingly. In fairness it should be noted that the Muslims were blamed disproportionately for it, although both Hindu and Muslim sepoys were treated with equal severity during the suppression. This second wave of Hindu sympathy on the part of the British ebbed with the rise of nationalism for which the year 1885, in which the Indian National Congress was founded, provides a convenient benchmark.

The upshot of all these developments was the fact that another religious community apart from the Islamic, namely the Christian, had also been created. What needs to be clearly recognised in this context is the role of politics in positing these communities in an oppositional, rather than an appositional, framework in relation to the Hindu. The existence of the Jews and Parsis testifies to the fact that minorities are not unknown to the Hindus but they did not pose a problem for Hindu polity because their presence was not vitiated by the ruler-ruled (i.e. political) factor. Until that factor emerged, even Islamic presence was not perceived as a problem. Arab Muslim traders on India's coasts "between the seventh and ninth centuries were treated with tolerance by Hindu rulers and the legend of the conversion of a Cheraman Perumal Rājā shows that they were allowed to propagate Islam ... at least one [Muslim] contributed financially to a Hindu temple" (Ahmad 1964:77). Even in the north, there "is persistent local tradition in certain old centers in the heart of Uttar Pradesh that Muslim families had settled there long before the conquest of the area by Muhammad Ghuri. In the city of Benares, there are Muslim *mohallas*, which, it is said, are anterior in date to the conquest of Benares by Muslims, and similar traditions are current about Maner in Bihar" (Ikram 1964:32). Even after the altered political equation in the north made the Muslim presence problematical for the Hindu, it did not affect the south. Thus Abdul Razak, the Persian ambassador at the Vijayanagar court, could write around the middle of the fifteenth century: "The People [or Calicut] are infidels; consequently I consider myself in an enemy's country, as the Mohammadans consider everyone who has not received the Qur'an. Yet I admit that I meet with perfect toleration, and even favour; we have two mosques and are allowed to pray in public" (Radhakrishnan 1939:312). Similarly, the Syrian Christian presence in India did not pose a problem for the Hindu, but European Christian presence became a problem, when Christians became rulers and Hindus the ruled.

This fluid situation, however, began to solidify in the post-Mutiny period, once the rule of the East India Company was taken over by the British Crown. This consolidation of British rule was accompanied

by the consolidation of 'Hinduism.' One needs to step back a little to appreciate this development.

VI

The British presence in India had put another word into play—*Hinduism*. The discussion of when it was first used is itself indicative of its significance, while the controversy surrounding its relationship with what passes for Hindu attests more generally to the basic thesis of the paper (Lorenzen 1999:630–659). The Oxford English Dictionary identifies its use by Max Müller in 1858 (King 1999:165). Charles Neumann employed it in the title of his work in 1831 (*ib.* 165). The Oxford English Dictionary identifies a still earlier use in 1829 (*ib.*), but Dermot Killingley identifies its use by Rammohun Roy in 1816 and suggests that “Rammohun was probably the first Hindu to use the word Hinduism” (*ib.*), although we are not quite certain whether it was first used by a Hindu. But the word soon caught on and with the linguistic unification of India through English (Panikkar 1963:120–121), and the increasing use of English in intra-faith activity within Hinduism (Hein 1977:106) and at the level of the emerging English-knowing elite (Hinnells and Sharpe 1972:4), in the post-Mutiny period. This period also saw the culmination, as it were, of the numerous reform movements, beginning with the Brahmo Samaj, founded in 1828 and culminating in the Gandhian dispensation, leading to an “increasing identification of Indian nationalism with reformed Hinduism” (Everett 1997:74; Panikkar 1963, *passim*; Jain 1996, Ch. II). Thus the last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of both Indian nationalism and a *pan-Indian* Hinduism, thereby raising the question of the relationship between the two. This issue, which remains unresolved to this day, goes back to the ambiguity inherent in the word *Hindu*—does it stand for a country or a religion? The fact that both the words: India as well as Hindu, etymologically go back to the same word (Sindhu) dramatises this issue of ambiguity, which now reincarnated itself in the question: will Indian nationalism (or nationalisms) be territorial or religious in nature? The semantic ambiguity in the word Hindu itself also found

expression in the question whether this ‘new’ Hinduism itself will be parochial or universal in character.

One can thus visualise two channels along which the energies released by the emerging nationalist forces in India could play themselves out, when the pot was stirred by the Partition of Bengal in 1905 (Spear 1994:759). One channel along which the nationalist energies could flow was that of *territorial nationalism*—an aspiration represented by the Indian National Congress. Another was represented by the All-India Muslim League, formed in 1906, more in line with the optional channel of *religious nationalism*. Although there was an initial Hindu reaction also to move in that direction (Jaffrelot 1996:6,19), it was basically checked by the rise of Gandhian influence (Everett 1997:73) in Indian politics from 1920 onwards and the primacy which the Indian National Congress began to enjoy thereafter (D.E. Smith 1963:456). Indian and Hindu nationalisms began to diverge after the collapse of the Khilafat movement (Minault 1982). The Khilafat campaign, which began with the Muslims joining forces with the Hindus “before the incredulous eyes of the British” (Spear 1994:784) in 1919, ended in a series of communal riots by mid-1920s (Page 1982:74). The founding of the RSS in 1925 symbolised this breach (Anderson and Damle 1987:34).

In the meantime neo-Hinduism was being revived along essentially universalistic lines, although it became somewhat revivalistic with the rise of the Arya Samaj. Nevertheless the Indian National Congress was able to contain this. It was in the 1920s that neo-Hinduism began to display a distinctly ethnic streak and evolved a word to go with it—*Hindutva*.

VII

The word Hindutva gained currency after it appeared as the title of a book written by V.D. Savarkar, first published in 1923. V.D. Savarkar and Mahatma Gandhi may be regarded as the patron saints of the two distinct forms of Hinduism the ambiguity of the word Hindu gave rise to. Paradoxical as it might appear, both these trends arose out of the same problematic—that of defining Hinduism. And both were

in a sense a response to the attempted definitions of Hinduism under Western aegis.

Western attempts at defining Hinduism followed two distinct courses: one moved in the direction of identifying it with Brahmanism (through caste) and the other in the direction of identifying it with spirituality in general (through 'Hindu tolerance'). They reflect perhaps the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement at play respectively, on the onomastic theatre of 'Hinduism.' It is not often realised that one of the major concerns of V.D. Savarkar in evolving the concept of Hindutva was to avoid the political fall-out of an excessively narrow definition of Hinduism (in his view), which had the unhappy consequence of excluding the Buddhists, the Sikhs, and the Jains from the Hindu community (1969:106). By comparison, Gandhi did not have much trouble with their inclusion within or exclusion from Hinduism because from the point of view of the spiritual interpretation of Hinduism, which he espoused, this was immaterial. All religions shared in this spirituality in common with Hinduism, irrespective of whether they could formally be labelled Hindu or not. For instance, when S. Radhakrishnan posed the question: "What is your religion?" in 1936, Mahatma Gandhi replied: "My religion is Hinduism which, for me, is Religion of Humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me" (Radhakrishnan and Muirhead 1936:2).

The full title of V.D. Savarkar's tract: *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* identifies the two core issues which he addresses: (1) who is a Hindu, and (2) what is Hindutva. The two issues are connected. He defines a Hindu as one who (1) regards the entire subcontinent as his (or her) motherland/fatherland (Savarkar 1969:84,119); (2) is descended of Hindu parents (*ib.* 129–131) and (3) and considers this land holy (*ib.* 113,134). These then constitute the three "essentials of Hindutva—a common nation (Rashtra), a common race (Jati) and a common civilization (Sanskriti)" (*ib.* 116). Note that religion does not figure in this ensemble and the "actual essentials of Hindutva are . . . also the ideal essentials of nationality" (*ib.* 137). The net effect of this exercise is to confer a Hindu nationality on all the followers of the four religions of Indian origin—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

One may wish to distinguish here between two expressions: “Indian religions” and “religions practised in India.” If the latter category is used to denote Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and so on, then the former category could be used to include only the adherents of the first four: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. According to the concept of Hindutva as elaborated by Savarkar, Hindu nationality would be restricted to “Indian religions,” in contrast presumably with Indian nationality which would be shared by the followers of all religions. This is one salient feature of Hindutva. The other, as noted already, consists of the fact that it posits an implicit distinction between religion and (shall we say) culture, in order to bracket the four “Indian religions” together.

Savarkar’s vision lay moribund for a long time, to the extent of being considered dead. This may be one way of explaining why Western scholars even in the 1960s were actually dissuaded by their Indian colleagues from showing interest in any political and cultural outfit associated with Hindutva, such as the Jan Sangh and the RSS (Ashby 1974:115). Ever since Mrs. Gandhi’s Emergency, however, these organisations, in their various incarnations, have been incrementally raising their profile and now stand centre-stage at the beginning of the new millennium (Jaffrelot 1996; Devalle 1995:306–322; Khilnani 1997:189–190). Most Indian and Western scholars feel uncomfortable in dealing with religion given their secular orientation and the discomfort level rises further when it comes to ‘fundamentalism’ in religion. This is understandable but it has led to a lack of nuance in dealing with key concepts. Hindutva provides an example here. Most regard it as constituting a static and monolithic concept from 1923 onwards when it was first proposed. The reality is that its context, text and subtext has changed over time, depending on the period involved (whether it is the period extending from 1923–1947, or 1947–1975, or 1975–1991 or post-1991) and the person expounding it (whether it is V.D. Savarkar, M.S. Golwalkar or Balraj Madhok, for instance).

Up until the attainment of Independence in 1947 the thrust of the Hindutva movement, as represented by the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, was first to resist what was viewed as a policy of appeasement

towards the Muslims and to oppose the move towards the Partition of India, which was viewed as the logical outcome of this policy. During this phase the Hindutva movement was not about gaining political power. This shift in Hindutva thinking came about as a result of reflection at the ease with which the party in power, the Indian National Congress, could suppress the Hindutva forces in the wake of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. This realization led to the formation of the Jan Sangh in 1951 (Jaffrelot 1996:87; Graham 1990). During the period when the Jan Sangh functioned as a party, the concept of Hindutva underwent an ideological shift. It took the form of identifying India with Hindutva, rather than Hindutva with India. As a result there was much talk of the need for Indianizing the Christian and Muslim minorities in India, rather than Hinduizing them (Madhok 1969b). This might seem like splitting a particularly fine hair to the outsider but it reflected a subtle realignment within Hindutva. It should be noted that the Indian government, both in the language of the Indian Constitution adopted in 1950, and subsequent legislation, has virtually adopted the Hindutva definition of a Hindu—as one who belongs to any religion of Indian origin. Hence the need, in the modern study of Hinduism, to distinguish one who is Hindu under Indian law from one who is Hindu “by religion” (Baird 1993:41–43, 31–58; Derrett 1968:46).

The imposition of Emergency by Mrs Indira Gandhi, towards the end of June in 1975, set a new series of forces in motion. It is now widely held that the only major elements in public life Mrs. Gandhi could *not* successfully suppress during the Emergency, despite a vigorous attempt to do so, were the elements associated with Hindutva (Jaffrelot 1996:273–77). This is what really accounts for its subsequent legitimation in the public eye. During this phase the Hindutva forces were ironically also in eclipse *after* the new government took office because they had decided to merge their identity in the Janata Party which consisted of the combined opposition, which had been electorally victorious in 1977. Once again the Hindutva forces had “gone cultural,” as they had been prior to Independence in 1947.

The Hindutva forces have always been secure in their cultural identity; it is their explicit political role they feel unsure about. Once again the political had lapsed into the cultural. Significantly, the Janata Party broke up over the issue of requiring its former Jan Sangh members to go beyond formal merger with the Janata Party and *also renounce their RSS connection*, at which the Jan Sangh balked, splitting the Janata Party in 1980. This issue is elliptically known as the dual membership issue (Jaffrelot 1996:304–11).

This period is sometimes referred to as return to ‘political untouchability,’ originally stemming from the guilt of being associated with Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination. The eclipse was to last a decade. With the re-emergence of the BJP after 1990 the question of ‘dual membership’ has surfaced again in another and more congenial form, now that the BJP is no longer a political pariah, in the form of its insistence, on the one hand, that it has not abandoned its stance on the Ram Temple, Article 356 and the Uniform Civil Code and its claim, on the other, that it is committed to the common program of the NDA (National Democratic Alliance in which the BJP is the lynchpin) which *excludes* these issues.

The issue of dual membership is obviously symmetrical with the double-decker significance of the word Hindu—‘Indian’ or ‘Hindu’? What requires further comment is a more central issue of Hindutva identity.

VIII

The issue of Hindutva identity (to be carefully distinguished from that of Hindu identity) is best investigated by exploring the thought of its *three* main ideologues on this point: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, popularly known as “Vir” Savarkar (1883–1966), Mahadev Sadashiv Golwalkar, otherwise known as “Guru” Golwalkar (d. 1973), and Balraj Madhok (1920–) (Klostermaier 1994, Ch. 30; Kohli 1993; Madhok 1982; etc.).

The basic template of Savarkar’s thought was presented earlier, so one needs to focus on the transformation of his legacy in the hands of those who followed him. In the hands of Guru Golwalkar it underwent

two interesting modifications. (1) Hindu identity was promoted in his thought at the expense of caste identity. Hindutva forces have looked askance at caste in general, holding it responsible in good measure for the downfall of the Hindus (however see Kane 1977, 5:2:1642) but most Hindutva reactions to it have been reformist. Golwalkar's aim, however, was to "abolish caste so as to build a nation defined as 'an aggregate of individuals'" (Jaffrelot 1996:61). This nation, however, is not defined as a secular but as a Hindu nation: "Golwalkar's definition of a nation was more restrictive than Savarkar's. Hindus appear in his writings 'as *the* nation in India'" (*ib.* 56). (2) Such integration in Hindu terms also reflected a stronger sense of separation from other religious communities within India. In contrast to the overtures V.D. Savarkar made to these communities on account of their Hindu "genes," Golwalkar wrote (*ib.* 56):

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture . . . or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's right.

If, however, the ethnic element is emphasised in Golwalkar's thought at the expense of the universal, the case is the reverse in some ways in the thought of Balraj Madhok. Madhok, as a member of the Jana Sangh recommended that it "should renounce the Sangathanist [RSS] model and its specific identity to submerge itself in the tide of 'Hindu traditionalism.'" This was to go hand in hand with the "'Indianisation' (in effect 'Hinduisation') of Muslims and Christians" (Jaffrelot 1996:234), but that it was called Indianisation constitutes a significant difference in nuance from Golwalkar's ideology.

IX

The time has come to try to relate these evolutions, or even convolutions, of Hindutva to the basic thesis of the paper—that like the words Hindustān and Hinduism, the word Hindutva is also caught up in the ambiguity and ambivalence of the word Hindu.

Post-Independence conceptual developments in Hindutva basically turn on two differential axes—of religion (and/or) culture and nation (and/or) state. Hindutva thought in general has tried to align itself with the *culture* axis in terms of the first set of terms and with the *nation* axis in the second set of terms. Out of the religion/culture division, culture would be viewed as a broader category, just as the nation would be viewed as a broader category in relation to state. Hindutva thought then has tried to connect itself with the more encompassing of the paired categories, even occasionally at the expense of the other.

Its agenda has been to thereby solve the problem of the presence of non-Hindu elements in Indian society and polity—primarily of the Muslims and Christians, and secondarily of such Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs as do not respond to the general interpretation of the term ‘Hindu’ it offers. By inviting them to partake only of Hindu culture and *not* religion, it wants to make it socially easier for these communities to become parts of the larger whole. It seeks to accomplish the same end politically by identifying itself with the aspiration of nationhood, as opposed to the machinery of a state, so that all could then belong to the Hindu nation in this reconstituted society and the state could then be effectively secular (Banerjee 1990:133). It is significant that the Hindutva rhetoric to this day has largely and centrally been that of a nation (Hindu Rashtra) rather than of a state (Hindu Raj) (even Shivaji spoke of ‘Hindu svaraj,’ not Hindu Raj) (Savarkar 1969:57). The key category is not Hindu statism but Hindu nationalism (Jain 1996).

The internal contradictions of the word Hindu, however, imperil these exercises, whether one turns to religion or culture. One crucial move Savarkar initiated was the tendency to associate Hinduism with culture rather than religion. His motive in doing so was to create a conceptual category for “Indian religions” (as distinguished from “religions practised in India”). But with this end constitutionally achieved (although still in contention) it soon evolved the locution of Hindu culture, from within the space inside “Indian religions,” to embrace all the “religions practised in India,” in a manner *analogous* to the way it was employed by Savarkar to embrace all “Indian religions” while situated within Hinduism, through the concept of Hindutva.

This curiously corresponds to that usage in the eighteenth century in the light of which designations such as ‘Hindu-Muslim’ and ‘Hindu-Christian’ were not oxymorons, with this difference that at that time an explicit pan-Indian identity in terms of Hinduism was not in the picture, as is now the case (King 1999:163; Mahmoud 1994:75).

This shift in the terms of discourse *also* carries with it the same bivalence which has characterised the word in its earlier appearance as Hindu, Hindustān and Hinduism. Philip H. Ashby writes perceptively (1974:121–122):

Modern interpretations of Indian culture have generally fallen into two broad classifications. The first has identified Hindu culture with Indian culture, suggesting that the operating norm for the latter has been the great tradition of the Hindu religion and the social strictures and customs that have accompanied that tradition. This we saw most clearly in the political area—for example, in the Jana Saṅgh’s ideological platform and its attempt to direct modern Indian political activity.

The other interpretation, namely, that India’s culture is a composite not to be identified with the term “Hindu,” has been more realistic in recognizing that contemporary Indian culture, like all widespread and long enduring cultures, has been the product of many influences, from the early Dravidian of thirty-five or more hundred years down to the British and Western of the last hundred or two hundred years. This approach recognizes the variables and imponderables that at any given time work together to constitute a culture. Indian thinkers who adhere to this position have also emphasized with pride India’s powers of assimilation and its potential as a cultural model for the modern world. This view reflects something of both the position of the nineteenth century reform movements and the social-cultural ambivalence of the liberal intellectual and political elite of the twentieth century.

Two conceptions of Indian culture now vie with each other for acceptance.

With the word Hindu, the two referents in terms of *region* or *religion* were in contention; with the word Hindustān, this bivalence took the form of nature of the *region* itself; in the realm of *religion* it surfaced in the ethnic and in the universalistic orientations of Hinduism and now it manifests itself in the realm of *culture*.

These developments reflect a difference in emphasis in terms of the evolving world-view (or at least India-view) of Hindutva. But

along with them a more potentially significant conceptual divide now surfaces, which can only be mentioned here and cannot be dealt with at length, because in Hindutva circles itself it is only mentioned and not developed. This issue turns on the question of whether the Hindutva movement is directed towards the formation of a Hindu *nation* or a Hindu *state*. The concept of a nation-state merges the two and obscures the point, but it needs to be addressed squarely in the context of a country like India.

Actually, a similar problem can be identified in the context of the nation itself. Here the crux of the issue lies in the distinction between a multi-nation state and a nation-state. Given its pluralism, India has in effect usually functioned as a multi-nation state, whether under Asoka, or Akbar or the British. The attempt to unify India with the cultural nationalism of the “white umbrella,” when it has always been polychrome, revives the old ambiguity of whether Hindu means land/people or religion/culture. The ambiguity now begins to manifest itself within the category of the state itself—national or multinational? This in *addition* to the question whether one has in mind an Indian state or a Hindu state. The last piece of the puzzle reincarnates the original conundrum.

X

Hindutva thus comes full circle. In trying to solve the problem of Hindu identity with that of Hindutva identity, it ends up becoming part of the problem once again. One may now be on a different part of the tree but one is still up the same tree.

This should not be taken to mean, however, that our exercise has been in vain. Such an exercise does allow us to posit a bivalent ‘Hindu’ reality capable of multiple formulations in several ways: local/global; geographical/civilizational; ethnic/universal, and so on. It also enables one to identify four attempts to engage this ambivalent Hindu historical/empirical reality: in terms of the categories of (1) region; (2) religion; (3) culture and (4) nation. The first attempt is represented by the word *Hindustān*, the second by the word *Hinduism*, the third by the expression *Hindu culture* and the fourth by the term

Hindutva. The list of the words which compose the title of the essay acquire the complexion of an inventory as a result of this exercise.

Because of the complex nature of the Indian reality each approach runs into its own limitations; each generates its own dilemma. The *regional* approach generates the dilemma: does India belong to the Hindus or do Hindus belong to India? The *religious* approach generates the dilemma: Is Hinduism a religion like any other religion or does it itself include other religions, denominationally or universalistically? The *cultural* approach generates the dilemma: Is Hindu culture constitutive of Indian culture or expressive of it? And finally, the *national* approach generates the dilemma: Should India opt for the secularism of Hinduism or the Hinduism of secularism?

At the heart of each lies the question central to all issues of identity: does the other belong to me or do I belong to it?

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KṚṢṆA'S INITIATION AT SĀNDĪPANI'S HERMITAGE¹

ANDRÉ COUTURE

Summary

In the *Harivaṃśa* 79 [HV], the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* 5.21 [ViP], the *Brahma-Purāṇa* 86 [BrP], and the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* 10.45 [BhP], immediately after the young Kṛṣṇa kills Kāṃsa, Kṛṣṇa's initiation at Sāndīpani's hermitage takes place. To date, this strange episode has not been studied in its own right. Occasionally mentioned in scholarly works, no attempt has been made to understand the importance or significance of this event within the Kṛṣṇa tradition. This paper begins with a summary of HV 79, and then moves on to examine the character of Sāndīpani, his connection with Garga/Gārgya, the initiation process and the underlying father/son relationships, as well as variations on these themes. The episode provides a narrative link between Saṃkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa's childhood and the rest of the story which deals with their adult life as *kṣatriyas*, and as such, helps to clarify the overall structure of the HV. Emphasizing Sāndīpani's role as a guru, this paper uncovers, little by little, his connections with (1) the whole *trimūrti* comprised of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva-Rudra, (2) the sacrificial logic which involves one who sacrifices, a deity and an officiant, and (3) the variations on the theme of filiation implied in the narration.

Modern Indologists have formulated different theories intended to explain both Kṛṣṇa's involvement in the Mahābhārata War, and his appearance as a great god accompanied by his elder brother, Saṃkarṣaṇa, a few centuries before Christ.² During the period when naturalistic explanations were dominant in Western anthropology, Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu were thought to be either ancient solar deities or vegetation spirits.³ J. Kennedy (1907) relied on A.F. Weber's thesis

¹ A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR) held at Memorial University (St John's) on June 2, 1997. This article forms part of a research project on the *Harivaṃśa* funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

² Cf. Hiltebeitel 1979.

³ Cf. Couture 1999:174–176.

(1867), which understood “Kṛṣṇa” to be an Indian form of “Christ,” but focussed on the influence played by nomadic tribes such as the Gujars (Gurjaras) which, supposedly, brought Christian legends to India with them some time between the 2nd and the 6th century. Scholars such as A.B. Keith (1925) and W. Ruben (1943), on the other hand, saw in Viṣṇu (and therefore in Kṛṣṇa) either a great pre-Aryan god or a divinity of the Dravidian-speaking people who had at one time occupied a large part of the Indian peninsula. Bhandarkar (1913), in his analysis of the birth of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, considered its conception of God to be the product of at least four earlier trends. Traditions dealing with Viṣṇu (a Vedic god), Nārāyaṇa (a cosmic, more philosophical deity), Vāsudeva (a real historical figure), and Kṛṣṇa Gopāla (a pastoral deity) were combined to give the Vaiṣṇava notion of god. J. Gonda, along with other Indologists, continued working along these lines, attempting to identify specific sources for each aspect of the patchwork tradition, determining various forms of borrowing, syncretism and so on.

Whereas Bhandarkar used the term “hero” as a designation for Vāsudeva, other scholars insisted that Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva was in fact a heroic figure who had been deified over time. This interpretation, in combination with Bhandarkar’s hypothesis, lies at the root of the explanations offered by W. Ruben or B. Preciado-Solis (1984). Drawing on methods of analysis used by modern folklorists (Otto Rank, Ken Gardiner, etc.), Preciado-Solis discovered the same narrative patterns in the Kṛṣṇa saga as those found in Celtic and Greek hero stories: a king is presented as a tyrant and usurper, a princess bears a child who kills the king, a hero is born supernaturally and reared by cowherds, a hero takes the place of the king he has slain or places another king on the throne, a hero founds a new city, wins a princess, defeats other kings or dies under strange circumstances. No doubt this type of analysis (oversimplified here) has its own value at the level of the narrative. Nevertheless, as my examination of the episode under study here will serve to demonstrate, it appears equally evident that one cannot account for major elements in Kṛṣṇa’s life if Kṛṣṇa’s role is reduced to that of the traditional hero.

Kṛṣṇa spends a marvellous childhood tending Kāṁsa's cows as a herder in the forests surrounding the city of Mathurā. His initiation, which takes place immediately following the account of his childhood and just before the Yādavas (Kṛṣṇa's clan) migrate from Mathurā to Dvārakā (or Dvāravatī), a new city built by Kṛṣṇa himself, is presented as a sort of bridge between the two halves of his life. To date, this strange episode, narrated in the oldest texts dealing with Kṛṣṇa's biography (*Harivaṁśa* 79 [HV], *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* 5.21 [ViP], *Brahma-Purāṇa* 86 [BrP], *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* 10.45 [BhP]), has not been studied in its own right. Occasionally mentioned in scholarly works, no attempt has been made to understand the importance or significance of this event within the Kṛṣṇa tradition. This episode is important because it shows clearly that Kṛṣṇa's life, before being characterized as heroic, corresponds in fact to typical Indian ritual standards. Attested to in the HV, Kṛṣṇa's oldest biography directs the reader not so much towards a general notion of the hero as towards a Vedic notion of sacrifice, towards the importance in Indian culture of begetting a son who will perform his father's funeral rites. All of this also implies a very specific conception of the deity. I will begin with a summary of HV 79, before moving on to examine the character of Sāṇdīpani, his connection with Gārgya, the initiation process and the underlying father/son relationships, as well as variations on these themes. Other matters, such as the initiation in the form of a journey to heaven, the acquisition of Pāñcajanya conch, etc., although important for an understanding of the story's impact, must be left to later research.

1. A Summary of *Harivaṁśa* 79 (vulg. 2.33)

Kṛṣṇa is in the pink of his youth. He is shining and his presence adorns the city of Mathurā like a mine brimming with gems. After some time, he accompanies his brother Balarāma (i.e., Saṁkarṣaṇa, also called Rāma) to Sāṇdīpani Kāśya's hermitage in the city of Avanti where they are to be instructed in the Dhanurveda (i.e., the knowledge of the weapons). On their arrival, the brothers recount their lineage (*gotra*) to Sāṇdīpani and inform him of their decision to begin studies. Janārdana (i.e., Kṛṣṇa) and Rāma adopt the proper behaviour,

sacrifice their egos (*nirahamkāra*) and submit to the will of their guru. Sāndīpani accepts them as students and instructs them in the various skills (*vidyā*). After a period of sixty-four days and nights, they achieve a full command of all the weapons. Seeing that the wisdom (*medhā*) of these boys goes beyond the possibilities of the merely human, Sāndīpani believes that boys are actually the Sun and the Moon. At festival times (*parvasu*), he sees them worshipping an apparition of great Tryakṣa (i.e., Śiva). Having fulfilled all his obligations, Kṛṣṇa asks Sāndīpani what they might give him in exchange for his acting as their preceptor (*gurvartha*). The guru who knows the power of these boys says that he wants them to restore the life of his son who has been carried to the bottom of the ocean by a big fish (*timi*) during a pilgrimage to Prabhāsa (near Dvārakā). With Rāma's approval Kṛṣṇa agrees, approaches the ocean and dives into the water. Ocean himself stands before him and gives him his regards. In reply to Kṛṣṇa's question, Ocean replies that the great Daitya Pāñcajana took the appearance of a great fish and swallowed the child. Kṛṣṇa, who is the Puruṣottama, attacks Pāñcajana and kills him, but this first attempt does not restore the child. Out of the dead body of Pāñcajana, Janārdana shapes his famous conch, known to all as Pāñcajanya. He defeats Vaivasvata (i.e., Yama) the god of death and restores life and a new body to the guru's son who had disappeared many years earlier. All are astonished at this marvel. Kṛṣṇa returns the guru's son to him along with a quantity of priceless pearls, keeping the Pāñcajanya conch for himself. With this, both heroes take their leave of Sāndīpani and make their way back to Mathurā. All the Yadus (or Yādavas), beginning with King Ugrasena, stand to greet the brothers. At the arrival of Govinda (i.e., Kṛṣṇa), the women begin to rejoice as if it were the festival of Indra (*indramaha*).⁴ All are happy and many signs appear in the cosmos, as if a new Kṛtayuga were thriving. At this very auspicious moment, Govinda enters the city in a chariot drawn by horses. Both

⁴ One such Indramaha is alluded to in HV 59, but Kṛṣṇa advises the cowherds to change this festival to a *girimaha*, that is a festival in honour of the mountains, namely, Mount Govardhana.

brothers enter Vāsudeva's house where they lay down their arms. They submit to King Ugrasena's authority and return to their games for some time thereafter.

2. *The Brahmins Gārgya and Sāndīpani*

This episode takes place in the period between Kṛṣṇa's childhood (HV 49–78) and the moment when the Yādavas, scared off by Kings Jarāsaṃdha and Kālayavana (HV 80–84), decide to move to Dvārakā. Once Kṛṣṇa kills Kāṃsa with his bare hands in the arena of Mathurā (HV 76) and Ugrasena is recognized as the true king of the city (HV 78), the narrative explains how both brothers learned to master the techniques of archery and the use of other weapons at Sāndīpani's hermitage. Beneath a simple exterior, the story is replete with innuendoes which one notices only when this version is compared to other versions of the narrative. The first question which springs to mind relates to Sāndīpani's identity. How is it that Sāndīpani is fit to teach Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa the science of archery? Sāndīpani lives in the city of Avanti (or Ujjayinī), famous for its temple honouring Mahākālā (i.e., Rudra). He is also called *kāśya*, a word meaning "born in Kāśī" according to Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary. Kāśī (or Vārāṇasī) is also a city where Śiva reigns. Moreover, the name Sāndīpani⁵ itself is related to the verb *sam-dīp*, meaning to blaze up, flame, burn, glow, often qualifying the fires in Epic and Purāṇic language (vg. HV 53.27). All these features coincide with the fact that, during this period, both brothers worship Tryakṣa (the three-eyed god), i.e., Rudra, the all-consuming god at the end of the *kalpa*.

Looking carefully at the whole HV, one concludes that Sāndīpani Kāśya's appearance in HV 79 is no mere coincidence. This Brahmin reappears later in the text (86.76) as a chaplain (*purohita*) in the new city of Dvārakā. On entering the city, Kṛṣṇa catches sight of his old father Ānakadundubhi (i.e., Vasudeva), King Ugrasena, his brother Baladeva (i.e., Saṃkarṣaṇa), Sāndīpani Kāśya and Brahmagārgya, and

⁵ Sāndīpani is based on the *vrddhi* of *sandīpana*, a word meaning "kindling, inflaming."

showers them all with all kinds of jewels (95.4–6). Janārdana, who always observes the protocols of hierarchy, first pays his respects to the purohita Sāndīpani before honouring Āhuka (i.e., Ugrasena), the king of the Vṛṣṇis (95.9).

Brahmagārgya is mentioned along with Sāndīpani in the city of Dvārakā. Another Brahmin, Brahmagārgya is also called Gārgya or Garga and is said to be the guru of the Vṛṣṇis and the Andhakas (85.7). He has been sent by Vasudeva to the cow station (*vraja*) to perform the childhood *saṃskāras* for Saṃkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa (49.30, 628*; 50.1, 629*; 96.44–45). The ViP (5.6.8–9) and the BrP (76.1–2) note that, at Vasudeva’s request, Garga carries out the *saṃskāras* for the cowherds secretly. BhP (10.5.1–2) is even more explicit: Brahmins were invited to recite the *svastyayana* (prescribed benedictory Vedic hymns) and perform the birth ceremonies (*jātakarman*) for Kṛṣṇa. They also come to the cow station for the festive ablutions which are performed to celebrate Kṛṣṇa’s turning in the bed (*authānikakautukāplava*, BhP 10.7.4). The BhP further stipulates that it is at Vasudeva’s request that Garga performs the purificatory rites of the two boys in the forest, where Nandagopa wholeheartedly welcomes him. “You have directly compiled a treatise on the science of astrology which is beyond the range of the senses. It is by that that a man knows his past and future. You are foremost among the knowers of the Vedas,” eulogizes Nanda (BhP 10.8.5–6, Tagore’s translation). Garga replies: “I am the family priest of the Yadus and I am known over the world as such. If I were to purify your son with religious rites, people will regard him as the son of Devakī” (BhP 10.8.7, Tagore’s translation, slightly modified). Garga performs the naming ceremony secretly and predicts the great prowess of both children (BhP 10.8.12–19). This declaration made by Garga appears so important as to be taken up again by Nanda in BhP 10.26.15–24.⁶ As in the HV, ViP and BrP, the BhP is aware that Garga is the family *purohita* of the Yādavas, but adds a clear statement to the effect that this Garga is identical with the author of a well-

⁶ Composed much later under *puṣṭimārga* influence (XVI–XVIIth centuries), the *Garga-saṃhitā* is directly linked to the prediction given by Garga in the BhP.

known old book on astrology.⁷ Garga knows the stars perfectly and the proper time to accomplish the prescribed rites, and is invited as such to perform these rites for Vasudeva's sons hidden in Nandagopa's cow station.⁸

Chapter 79 of the HV, which does not explicitly mention the *upanayana* ceremony,⁹ depicts Sāndīpani as being responsible for Saṃkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa's initiation to the Dhanurveda. Garga's pres-

⁷ The name of this book is the *Gārgīsaṃhitā*. It was written by one of the main authors quoted in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira (c. 500–550) (see Shastri 1969:440–443). There is also a Vṛddhagarga mentioned in MBh 9.37.14–15, quoted by Varāhamihira, and whose words are reported in ViP 5.23.25–27 in the context of Kṛṣṇa's biography.

⁸ Another Gārgya (or Garga) known as Śīśīrāyaṇa (or Śaiśīrāyaṇa), who is the *purohita* of the king of the Trigartas, is mentioned in relation to Kṛṣṇa. This story is told in HV 85.7–17 (see also 25.8–13; 22.7–12; ViP 5.23.1, etc.). It is said that this Gārgya remained a *brahmacārin* and, as such, did not seek the company of women. One day, his brother-in-law made a fool of him by calling him a eunuch in public. Reacting to this insult, Gārgya decided to take up ascetical practices in order to obtain a son from Śiva-Rudra. For twelve years he ate iron filings and was eventually granted his request. At the same time the king of the Yavanas, who could not produce a son either, heard of the favor granted to Gārgya. He sent for the ascetic, encouraged him and settled him as a cowherd in the middle of the *gopīs* of his cow station. The Apsaras Gopālī disguised herself as a cow-woman and conceived the son promised by Rudra to Gārgya. "The child grew in the gynaeceum of a childless king who was a Yavana, a great king: he was given the name Kālayavana" (HV 25.12). Many Mleccha kings took refuge in this unshakeable being and followed him. On account of this powerful Kālayavana, Kṛṣṇa preferred to leave Mathurā and to move to the Western coast where he built Dvārakā. Kālayavana is an important character who is eventually killed by Kṛṣṇa in the HV. I intend to examine this character in a later study. Another Gārgya is also mentioned in HV 16.5: seven Brahmins who were not devoted to the Fathers became his students in a former life. Even if they are most probably distinct characters, all these Gārgyas should be taken into account, since they all bear some relationship, however remotely, to Kṛṣṇa.

⁹ Borrowing Brian K. Smith's own words, one could define the Vedic initiation as "a constructive or transformative ritual" (*saṃskāra*) through which one is reborn into the Aryan society with a differentiated, hierarchically ordered identity, a specific knowledge imparted by a qualified teacher, and a qualification for performing the sacrifices that will "continue the ontological process of development and refinement

ence must be emphasized in this context because the BhP 10.45 distinguishes two different steps in this initiation, thus helping to clarify the relationship between the two gurus. According to this passage, Vasudeva asks Garga and other Brahmins to perform the *dvijasamskṛti* (or *upanayana*) for both his sons. Having gone through this *samskāra* and attained the status of a twice-born (*dvijatvaṃ prāpya*), the brothers immediately take the vow of celibacy required of those who wish to learn about the Gāyatrī-mantra (*gāyatraṃ vratam*) from Garga, the family priest of the Yadus (*gargād yadukulācāryād*). The *upanayana* ritual marks the passage from childhood to full membership in the community. First of all, Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa are transformed into twice-born *kṣatriyas*, reborn out of the Vedas because they have heard the Gāyatrī or Sāvitrī mantra, and therefore entitled to perform sacrifices.¹⁰ Then, wishing to reside in a preceptor's house (*gurukule vāsam*) to complete their education, they approach Sāndīpani Kāśya. Only after they have been confirmed as *twice-born* do they pass through a specialized training in a *gurukula*. The goal of this stay in Sāndīpani's hermitage is to qualify them, among others things, to handle the most terrible weapons. As with the *purohita* of the Yādavas, Garga had to perform the different *samskāras* (particularly *nāmakaraṇa* and *upanayana*) in order to complete Saṃkarṣaṇa's and Kṛṣṇa's social identities as *kṣatriyas* of the Yādava clan. Sāndīpani leads the brothers a step further in their initiation by giving them the ability to destroy the whole world.

From a mythological point of view, Garga appears to be continuing the work of Brahmā the creator when he imparts to Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa attributes related to the completion of their own beings. On the other hand, in Sāndīpani's hermitage, both boys complete their studies and master the secrets of weaponry. Having acquired new

of being, in both this life and the next" (cf. Smith 1986: esp. 66, 83–84; and 1989, ch. 4: "The Ritual Construction of Being"). See also Gonda 1985:316–317.

¹⁰ Sacrifices seem to be the central rites for the *kṣatriyas* of the HV (vg. 88.44). Kṛṣṇa himself is reported to have been initiated by a one-day (Soma) sacrifice (*dīkṣito* ... *ekāhena* ... *karmaṇā*, 101.7–8,13; see below).

divine bodies adorned with every type of weapon, they possess the power, as Rudra himself does, to reduce their worst enemies to ashes. Not only are both brothers able, through Gārgya's ritual activity, to carry out their responsibilities in the Vṛṣṇi community (especially the protection of the Brahmins), but they also gain the power to destroy all existing realities making way for the creation of a new world. Actually, this double initiation qualifies Saṁkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa, who have already been presented as Śeṣa's and Viṣṇu's manifestations, to perform the loftiest duties. Being born in Vasudeva's family as Saṁkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa, the serpent Śeṣa and the god Viṣṇu are henceforth acting as full-fledged Yādavas able to use both Brahmā's creative power and Rudra's destructive weapons.

3. *Saṁkarṣaṇa's and Kṛṣṇa's Initiation Understood as Sacrifice*

After the usual birth ceremonies (*jātakarman*) and name-giving (*nāmakaraṇa*) take place, one of two scenarios may follow: either the initiation to the Dhanurveda at Sāndīpani's hermitage takes place alone, or, according to the BhP, both the *upanayana* celebrated by Garga and the initiation at Sāndīpani's hermitage are performed. Even if one hesitates to link the purohita Garga/Gārgya to Brahmā and the guru Sāndīpani to Rudra, it appears that glimpses of these deities may be caught in the shadow of these Brahmins. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the preceding discussion is that in texts dealing with Kṛṣṇa's life, both his and Saṁkarṣaṇa's human development are treated in the most orthodox manner.

At any rate, from a ritual point of view, the important thing to remember in this context is that the initiation constitutes the first and central part of a sacrifice (*yajña*).¹¹ More precisely, it is the part of a sacrifice in which the one who sacrifices (*yajamāna*) offers his own body as a victim to the gods before offering food or another oblation as a substitute for himself. Moving on to more general conclusions, since

¹¹ The *dīkṣā* itself has been frequently studied and there is no need to repeat a description of it here. See Lévi 1966 [1898]:102–108; Gonda 1985:315–462; Thite 1975: esp. 112–123.

Samkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa have passed through such initiations, one can infer that their adult lives may also be understood as real sacrifices. The fact that Kṛṣṇa himself is often identified with the Yajñapuruṣa (i.e., the sacrifice personified as a man) or with the Puruṣottama (i.e., the Supreme Person), and that in the *Bhagavadgītā*, he affirms that the only action worth performing is one done for sacrifice (3.9) corroborates this assertion. As it now appears useful to resituate the initiation of both brothers in the context of sacrifice, it is also worth noting that a *dīkṣā* requires three things: a person to perform the sacrifice, an oblation and a deity. Charles Malamoud underlines the complexity of the relationships between guru and student, seen from the sacrificial point of view, in the following manner: “There are two real persons, the preceptor and the student; but as their relationship is assimilated to a sacrifice, there are three acting characters: the one who sacrifices, the deity and the officiant; the one who sacrifices is always the student, but the preceptor alternates between the role of deity and officiant (when he acts as the officiant, the Veda is the deity).”¹²

If HV 79 is viewed from this perspective, Sāndīpani may be considered either as a deity (*devatā*) or as an officiating priest (*ṛtvij*). In the first case, as they are students, Kṛṣṇa and Samkarṣaṇa are identified as those performing the sacrifices (*yajamāna*), offering themselves to their guru Sāndīpani as a deity. Since he is the guru, Sāndīpani is also considered to be identical to Rudra himself and, as such, receives the offering that the boys make of their own egos and also of the bodies that they must cast aside before donning new ones. They surrender themselves completely to Sāndīpani, give him everything they are and join him in a relation of profound devotion. At festival times (*parvasu*), the text explicitly says, both brothers honour Tryakṣa (i.e., Rudra). On the other hand, Sāndīpani might also be understood to

¹² “Il y a deux personnes réelles, le maître et l’élève; mais dès lors que leur relation est assimilée à un sacrifice, il y a trois personnages à jouer: sacrifiant, divinité, officiant; le sacrifiant est toujours l’élève, mais le maître assume tour à tour l’un et l’autre des rôles de divinité et d’officiant (quand il est officiant, c’est le Veda qui est la *devatā*)” (Malamoud 1976:186).

be playing the role of the officiating priest of the sacrifice which Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa offer after they have learned the Dhanurveda. In fact, the study of the Dhanurveda seems to imply a sacrifice to the deities who possess each of these weapons, even though no mention of such a procedure is made here. Nevertheless, just as when a priest is invited to officiate at a sacrifice, the work that Sāṇḍīpani carries out when assisting both brothers in their studies is rewarded with appropriate fees. Kṛṣṇa brings Sāṇḍīpani's son back to life and this deed is considered to be a fitting recompense for his work as a guru. This double sacrificial reading of what occurs between a guru and his students shows that it is logically possible to account for both the presence of Tryakṣa as a deity whom Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa regularly worship, and the readiness of the boys to pay their guru a formal fee (*gurvartha*). A comparison with Arjuna's *dīkṣā* in *Mahābhārata* [MBh] III (38–45; 163–169) will prove useful for establishing the plausibility of such an analysis of the HV 79 episode.¹³

During the twelve-year exile which the Pāṇḍavas spent in the forest, Yudhiṣṭhira receives secret knowledge (*upanīṣad*/*brahman*) from Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana or Vyāsa. To achieve it and become invincible, Arjuna has to visit both Indra and Rudra. First, Arjuna submits to an initiation, practices a strict control in word, body and thought and receives the instruction which Yudhiṣṭhira received from Vyāsa. In this connection, he leaves the forest for a journey to the North, passes over the Himālayas, and finally meets Indra who is disguised as an ascetic on a mountain called Indrakīla. Indra asks Arjuna to stop since he has reached the ultimate goal. Impressed by Arjuna's firm decision to continue his journey, Indra grants him a favour. Arjuna asks for the weapons he will need to avenge his brothers hidden in the wilderness. "When you have seen the Lord of Beings, three-eyed, trident-bearing Śiva, then I shall give you all the weapons of the Gods, son," answers Indra. Arjuna stands on the peak of mount Himālaya and engages in ascetic practices which scare all the great seers. Forced, as it were, to rush up to Arjuna, Śiva approaches him disguised as a Kirāta, a hunter

¹³ On this passage, one can also read the analysis offered by Scheuer 1982:205–245.

from the mountains, and strikes a Dānava named Mūka, who comes to threaten Arjuna's life. For a long time, Arjuna wrestles with this strange enemy who is literally able to devour all his arrows. He finally falls unconscious, having been reduced by the god to a ball of flesh (*pinḍa*). When he wakes up, Arjuna recognizes Rudra, begs his mercy and receives the Pāśupata, a weapon also called the Brahmaśīras. After receiving others weapons from Yama, Varuṇa and Kubera, Arjuna goes to the city of Indra where he obtains and masters the use of all the much coveted arms. Gandharva Citrasena also teaches him how to sing and dance. He stays in this city for five years. As a fee for his guru, Arjuna fights and defeats Indra's personal enemies, the thirty million Nivātakavacas living in an inaccessible city in the ocean.

This episode is clearly divided into two parts involving both Rudra and Indra. Arjuna goes to Indra's celestial city, passes a test prepared for him by Indra who was disguised as an ascetic, before running to Rudra's dwelling where he gains the favour of the god. It would seem that, in order to receive the weapons from Indra, Arjuna must not only pay Rudra the appropriate fee but must also submit completely to him. Clearly, Arjuna's initiation implies a double operation: the acquisition of arms from the gods and the submission to the god Rudra are two separate acts. Both are necessary, but the submission to Rudra remains a prerequisite to the acquisition of an energetic body able to resist the most terrible enemies. In Kṛṣṇa's story, as in Arjuna's, the *yajamāna* (Kṛṣṇa or Arjuna) sacrifices his human body in a severe *tapas*, and prepares himself through the use of similar ascetic practices to don a new divine body which incorporates every imaginable weapon. The first part of both stories concerns Rudra, the Destroyer; the second part deals, explicitly or implicitly, with the ritual construction of a new divine body with the help of all the gods, including Indra.

Among the metaphors used by ritualists to evoke the *dīkṣā* process, one of the most usual depicts the *dīkṣita* as reassuming the form of a foetus so as to be born again, thus enabling the *dīkṣita* to become a *twice-born*. A similar image is used for the teacher who becomes pregnant with his student, bringing about, as it were, the production of a new body for his student, and finally giving birth to him (cf.

Atharvaveda 11.5). The *saṁskāras* or life-cycle rituals serve to purify, refine, and elaborate the perfect human body needed to act responsibly inside the Hindu society. This is why Garga must perform these rites (especially the *upanayana*) for both Saṁkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa. The same metaphor lies behind Sāndīpani's story. In order to acquire knowledge of all the weapons, both brothers have to strip themselves of their egos (*nirahamkāra*, v. 4). When they come back to their home after their stay at Sāndīpani's hermitage, they lay down (*vinyas*) their weapons and return to their games (HV 79.39). Before descending to earth, the glorious Viṣṇu proceeded in the same manner: he went to a cave of the Meru named Pārvatī and laid down his ancient body (*purāṇam tatra vinyasya dehaṁ harir udāradhiḥ*, 45.49). Later, in HV 81, both brothers decided to don their ancient weapons (*āyudhānāṁ purāṇāṇām ādāne*, v. 55) when they have to fight against Jarāsaṁdha. These four energies which are Viṣṇu's weapons immediately fall from the sky (*catvāry etāni tejāṁsi viṣṇupraharaṇāni ca*, v. 60). From this moment on, the brothers, now visually identical with the person of Viṣṇu (*sākṣād viṣṇos tanūpamau*, v. 65), tap into their own divine power and begin to fight their adversary. The energetic body that Saṁkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa received was Viṣṇu's own divine body. The weapons and the many skills (*mantras*, etc.) which they possess are the equivalent of a divine body. A body (human or divine) is conceived of as a sort of garment to be put on and taken off. In the same way as Viṣṇu, at the Earth's request, takes off his *tejas*-made body before descending to earth, once the *dīkṣā* is performed, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna must also, on specific occasions, cast aside their energetic bodies.

4. An episode built on father/son relationships

Sāndīpani gives birth to Kṛṣṇa and Saṁkarṣaṇa by teaching them the art of archery. In keeping with the logic of the metaphor, we may also say that these students are his sons. Since the payment the guru requests is proportional to the work done, it seems logical that these sons duly honour their guru by returning his only son to him, the son who had been seized by the terrible Pañcajana and carried off by Yama.

While acting this way, Kṛṣṇa and Saṁkarṣaṇa simply confirm that they are “good sons” (*satputra*) for their guru.

The way in which this episode relates to the theme of filiation is clarified by the ViP and the BrP, which combine ideas scattered throughout the preceding chapters of the HV into a single narrative. (A) On seeing Devakī and Vasudeva, Kṛṣṇa says that he and his brother have acted as true sons, bowing before the elders of the Yadus. Something he says on this occasion helps to clarify the entire passage: “That portion of one’s life which is spent without worshipping one’s parents is indeed futile in the case of good sons. O father, if an embodied being performs the worship of preceptor (*guru*), gods (*deva*), Brahmins (*dvija*) and parents, his life becomes fruitful” (BrP 86.3cd–5ab; ViP 5.21.3–4). (B) Kṛṣṇa consoles Kāṁsa’s wives who are weeping over his dead body. He releases Ugrasena from prison, proceeds to his consecration as king (*abhiṣeka*), and performs the funeral rites of his son Kāṁsa. Kṛṣṇa tells Ugrasena: “As a result of the curse of Yayāti this family does not deserve a kingdom. But now that I am ready to be your servant (*bhṛtya*), you can command even Devas, and why not, even kings?” (BrP 86.12; ViP 5.21.12). Then, Kṛṣṇa asks Vāyu to bring the Sudharmā *sabhā*, Indra’s marvellous Assembly Hall, befitting only a king (*rājārha*) down to earth. (C) Only after these two scenes, does Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa’s initiation at Sāṁdīpani’s hermitage and the liberation of the guru’s son take place.

In fact, all three of these scenes deal with the problem of filiation, be it biological or analogical. (A) Saṁkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa are good sons (*satputra*). By killing Kāṁsa who has confined them, they honour their own parents. According to the famous *śloka*, already quoted twice in the HV (5.24; 66.20), a son is called a *putra*, because he liberates his parents from the hell “*put*.” This reasoning applies to more than just relatives. It is also applicable to other analogical sons such as the students who must similarly liberate their gurus and to the good subjects (*prajā*) who have to rescue their king. (B) As a loyal subject, Kṛṣṇa worships King Ugrasena whose son Kāṁsa was killed, releasing him from all his bonds. This king was himself unable to reign due to Yayāti’s curse. Kṛṣṇa has to intervene in the north-eastern part of India

(cf. HV 22.17) to restore the Yādava lineage which lost its kingdom when old Yayāti cursed his son Yadu who refused to support his father in his old age (HV 22.27–28). (C) Finally, Kṛṣṇa honours guru Sāndīpani when he and his brother Saṁkarṣaṇa liberate the Daitya from the ocean, the son who had been snapped up by Pañcajana.¹⁴

Kṛṣṇa, as we have seen, acts as a son in three ways. He first restores the wholeness of his parents by saving them from bondage and looking after them in their old age. He then restores the Yādava King, Ugrasena, by re-establishing his lineage against Yayāti's curse and acting as his servant (*bhṛtya*). Finally, he restores his guru Sāndīpani by serving him as a son and rescuing the son he had lost. Without a son, a man is already dead. Using a provocative formula, Paul Mus said in his famous *Barabudur*: "A son is the rescued form of his father (Un fils est la forme sauvée de son père)," meaning that a son is the form of his father after the father has been saved by him. The commentary that follows in Mus' book helps to understand the Indian logic in this matter. In India, notes Mus, "One does not inherit *from* one's father; instead one inherits one's father."¹⁵ And when a son inherits his father, he does not receive only his belongings, he receives his very self. The son has actually become the father. Even if the son can also be said to be different from the father, filiation begins by a duplication of the father's self, wherever the relationship of filiation is recognized.¹⁶ From the Vedic point of view, the son is of course a physical body (by birth) growing through food, but above all it is a ritual construction

¹⁴ As one might guess from this overview, true filiation exemplified by the case of the *satputra* Kṛṣṇa is certainly a theme which runs throughout the whole of the HV. Marcelle Saindon (1998) has shown how important it is to take the father/son dyad into account for a correct reading of chapters 11–19 of the HV.

¹⁵ Mus 1935:119–122 offers a corrective to the interpretation of A.B. Keith (1925:579–80). This sentence is translated by Strong (1989:82).

¹⁶ One should not overstress Mus' contention. I agree with Brian K. Smith (1989: first chapters) when he explains that the cultural reduplication implied in the ritual of initiation lies somewhere between an excessive and unproductive resemblance (*jāmi*) and an extremely differentiated being (*pṛthak*), that is at once an over-connection and a disconnection.

in which a man projects himself (through *saṃskāras*) and on which he props himself up to gain immortality. Texts like the HV and the *Purāṇas* are very critical of the possibility of becoming immortal by ritual means only. Life is rather seen as a series of births and deaths, of fathers and sons. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Kṛṣṇa's intervention has been enveloped by successive layers of lineages (*vaṃśa*). The oldest *Upaniṣads* say explicitly that, once the *ātman* is discovered, begetting sons is no longer worth while (esp. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 3.5.1; 4.4.22). Later Purāṇic texts would say exactly the opposite: it is useless to renounce begetting sons. The full recognition of a son by his father implies the father's death (or his retreating to the forest in renunciation). This renunciation is a regular feature in the Epics, except in those cases where a father might imitate king Yayāti who tried to achieve immortality by foolishly stripping his own sons of their right to kingship. The same argument applies also to the guru or the *purohita* who "begets" a *dīkṣita*. Although birth through initiation is usually thought of as a metaphor, in this context the fact that the adequate fee is the resurrection of the guru's biological son makes it clear that we are dealing with a much more literal interpretation. The guru's son has to be thought of as the rescued form of Kṛṣṇa's preceptor Sāṇḍipani, as well as a paradigmatic figure for all sons whose lives must be ritually constructed to fill up the bamboo of their lineage.¹⁷

5. *Variations on the Theme of the Son Restored to Life*

Kṛṣṇa's and Saṃkarṣaṇa's initiation introduces the theme of the son brought back to life. This episode is not an isolated case. Let us now consider three often neglected stories which throw light on this strange resurrection narrative.

¹⁷ In the Sanskrit language, *vaṃśa* means at once the hollow bamboo and the lineage that must be filled up with sons. Actually, in HV 68.28–29, Kṛṣṇa is said to come to earth in order to cause the Yādavas to fill up (*āpūrayiṣyanti*) and extend their lineage (cf. Couture 1982:140).

A. *Arjuna's final test after his initiation with Droṇa (MBh 1.123.68–75).* In the *Ādiparvan* of the MBh, Bhīṣma rejects Drupada Yajñasena as an appropriate guru for his sons, finally settling on Droṇa as his choice. Droṇa accepts on the condition that his fees are to be paid on the battlefield; Kauravas must fight King Drupada for his kingdom. At the end of their initiation to all weapons, Droṇa goes with his pupils to bathe in the river Ganges. When he dives into the water, a powerful crocodile that lived in the river was prompted by Time to grab him by the shin. Although he is quite able to save his own life, he purposely orders his pupils to kill the crocodile and save him. He has not finished speaking before Arjuna, with a burst of five arrows, kills the crocodile under the water. Droṇa deems him the best of all his students and rewards him with the gift of a remarkable, invincible weapon named *Brahmaśiras*.¹⁸

This episode immediately follows Arjuna's initiation. As a sort of metaphorical fee (that anticipates the real fee), Droṇa requires his students to save his very life. To understand the real import of such a gesture, one must take into account that the students are like embryos begotten by their guru. At the end of the *dīkṣā*, those students may properly be called sons of their guru. In accordance with the traditional etymology of the word *putra*, it is only after a son has been begotten by his father, who has brought him to his specific perfection through the appropriate *saṃskāras*, that a son (*putra*) is able to save his father. In the present scenario, in a contrived setting, the guru pretends to die and is brought back to life by his "son." Arjuna defeats Death itself and becomes invincible. To become a real son is metaphorically to restore a father's life.

B. *The salvation of Brahmin's sons (HV 101–104).* Later in the HV, when the Yādavas have moved to Dvārakā, Vaiṣaṃpāyana recounts a story to Janamejaya which Arjuna had told to Yudhiṣṭhira as a way of illustrating Vāsudeva's (i.e., Kṛṣṇa's) greatness. Arjuna was visiting his relatives at Dvārakā. Once, when he had committed to perform a

¹⁸ This section reproduces the wording found in van Buitenen's translation.

one-day (*ekāha*) sacrifice, an excellent Brahmin approached him and asked him for assistance. The Brahmin's problem was even worse than Sāndīpani's had been. As soon as they were born, each of his three sons had died. He implored Vāsudeva's protection to save the fourth one who was about to be born. The protection of a Brahmin prevails over ritual integrity, argues Kṛṣṇa in his desire to save the Brahmin. To allow Kṛṣṇa to honour his undertakings (*dīkṣā*), Arjuna offers to go to the village himself in order to save the child. He left Dvārakā with a huge army and surrounded the Brahmin's house. Unfortunately, these measures were to no avail. He failed to protect the Brahmin's son who was ravished by a Rākṣasa as soon as he left his mother's womb. Arjuna was ashamed and the Brahmin laughed at his false claims. When he was back in Dvārakā, Govinda (i.e., Kṛṣṇa) noticed Arjuna's distress, consoled the Brahmin and decided to take charge of the operation. Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and the Brahmin went north (102.23), met the Ocean which solidified its waters so that they might cross, were honoured by the biggest mountains which let them pass, drove through a zone of thick darkness and ran into a bright light in the shape of a man (*puruṣa*) which covered the whole world. All three of them entered this great light, emerging a moment later with the four children. As they reached Dvārakā again, Kṛṣṇa entertained his listeners with even more marvellous stories. Then at Arjuna's request he explained what had happened. A Mahātmā, he says, kidnapped these children, thinking it was the only way to contemplate Kṛṣṇa who always comes for Brahmins. As in chapters 10–11 of the *Bhagavadgītā* (or Mārkaṇḍeya's vision according to MBh or HV), Vāsudeva finally explains how he is identical to the whole world and all its parts.

Kṛṣṇa's initiation to an *ekāha* sacrifice serves as a background for this story. Arjuna does not realize his own invincibility. In order to teach Arjuna the power of sacrifice, Kṛṣṇa takes advantage of his own position to show Arjuna how it is possible, while being a *dīkṣita*, to use his own divine body to support the Brahmins. The sacrificial theory says that, in such initiations, the one who sacrifices becomes an embryo, constructing a new divine body for himself that he will use as a vehicle to reach heaven. The sacrifice is at the same time the vehicle

and the trip to heaven. The Brahmin of this episode, whose sons are in the power of Death, asks for the *kṣatriya*'s protection. After the first trip had failed, Kṛṣṇa himself takes the lead and decides to unveil the powerful secret world to which sacrifice gives access. Metaphorically, he crosses different steps leading to the world of total freedom. The sons still have to play a role in the liberation of the Brahmin, but they must first be saved by Kṛṣṇa himself who reveals himself as the Yajñapuruṣa and as the model of all those who sacrifice. Kṛṣṇa is able to liberate the Brahmin's sons from death because he is the greatest of the *puruṣas*, and as such governs the perpetual movement of creation and destruction of all beings.

C. The resurrection of Devakī's sons (BhP 10.84–85). After Kṛṣṇa killed Bhaumāsura, a number of sages, watching secretly the intense love that was being experienced on earth at that time, came to earth to see Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma (i.e., Saṃkarṣaṇa). As soon as they saw him, they praised him as the ruler of the world, who had concealed his universal dominion under mere human acts (84.16), behaving like an ordinary person and teaching the world by his example (84.15). As they took leave of Kṛṣṇa and the others, Vasudeva (i.e., Kṛṣṇa's father) asked them how one might best purify oneself of all impurities. "One should devoutly propitiate and worship Viṣṇu, the Lord of sacrifices, by performing sacrifice" (84.35). It is the best way to give up covetousness for wealth, to spend it in the performance of sacrifices and gifts (84.38). "After having paid your debt to the sages by studying the Veda, to the fathers by begetting sons, you have to discharge your debt to the gods by performing sacrifices," said the sages. Hearing those words, Vasudeva performed as many sacrifices as he could, paid the sacrificial priests abundant fees, and gave all the people generous presents. The atmosphere was one of warm friendship and even Nandagopa postponed his departure for three months (84.66).

On one occasion after their return to Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma had paid their respects to their parents who had already heard the words of the sages and could not prevent themselves from singing the praises of their sons. On hearing that her sons had brought the son of

their preceptor back to life (85.27), Devakī was wonderstruck and took advantage of this moment to implore them in the following terms: “At the behest of Time and in response to the wishes of his father, both of you brought back the son of your preceptor Sāndīpani, who had died so many years earlier, from the region of Pitṛs (fathers), i.e., the abode of death and presented him in homage to your preceptor (thus paying the debt of your preceptorship). You should similarly fulfil my desire as both of you are the Lords of the masters of Yoga. I desire to see, brought to life, my sons who have been killed by Kāṃsa, the King of Bhojas” (85.32–33). Then, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa entered the nether world called Sutala. Kṛṣṇa explained to King Bali who welcomed them, that Devakī’s first six sons were Marīci and Ūrṇa’s sons in the first Manvantara. They were punished for having laughed at Brahmā who was preparing to cohabit with his daughter. Having explained his mission to Bali, he brought back the six children to Devakī.

This variation on the same theme is explicitly linked to Sāndīpani’s initiation. The sequence of events is the same: at first, Vasudeva performs sacrifices; afterwards and as a consequence of this abundance of sacrifice, Kṛṣṇa brings back to life Devakī’s sons. Even if the relation between the sacrifices and the resurrection of the sons is somewhat loose, the explicit mention of Sāndīpani’s sacrificial fees illustrates that this earlier episode serves as a model for the episode recorded in the BhP.

Conclusion

HV 79 provides a narrative link between Saṃkarṣaṇa’s and Kṛṣṇa’s childhood and the rest of the story which deals with their adult lives as *kṣatriyas*. As the episode under study in this paper provides insight into the overall structure of the HV, I have chosen to emphasize those topics which prove key to uncovering that structure. Therefore, the focus of this paper has been to consider Sāndīpani as a guru. I have unveiled, little by little, Sāndīpani’s connections with (1) the whole *trimūrti* comprised of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva-Rudra, (2) the sacrificial logic which involves one who sacrifices, a deity and an officiant, and (3) the variation on the theme of filiation implied in the narration. This paper,

while not pretending to exhaust all the possibilities of this episode, intends above all to underline the importance of this apparently trivial story for an understanding of the whole life of Kṛṣṇa as presented in the HV. Further investigation would certainly shed light on other important themes alluded to in this episode.

By the same token, this paper intends to show that the Sāṇḍīpani episode is neither primitive, nor a confusing mixture of selected purple passages. On the contrary, it is my deep conviction that Kṛṣṇa mythology emerges from the reflections of Brahmins involved in rituals and eager to tell stories that reflect the new conception of the deity found in the Epics and the Purāṇas. As analysis of the HV progresses (cf. Couture 1995–96), two points emerge with greater clarity. First, Kṛṣṇa's initiation at Sāṇḍīpani's hermitage is closely connected to the overall plan and import of the MBh and HV; and second, better knowledge of these texts will undoubtedly be the key to disentangling the threads of the very curious story which is told in HV 79. In contrast to earlier interpretations whose general theories short-circuited the ritual and technical allusions contained in these episodes, this essay has demonstrated that few of the details contained in these ancient texts are there by chance. Although it may be a cliché to say so, it bears repeating that it is preferable to resituate the episodes of Kṛṣṇa's biography within the setting that is proper to them and to uncover the Hindu categories which underlie them, than it is to tack onto these myths the so-called universal keys of "great god" or "hero."

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LIGHT FROM DISTANT ASTERISKS TOWARDS A DESCRIPTION OF THE INDO-EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS HERITAGE¹

PETER JACKSON

Summary

An attempt is made to summarize and synthesize new and old evidence regarding the religious heritage among peoples speaking Indo-European languages in pre-Christian and pre-Islamic Eurasia. Initial stress is put on the methodological, theoretical and ideological problems of such an undertaking. The rest of the paper discusses how the transmission of heritage was conceptualized (with examples from Vedic and Greek literature), to what extent we are able to discern the outlines of an Indo-European pantheon, the possibility of tracing the realizations of hereditary, mythical motifs in the oldest Indo-European literatures, and the prospects for a comparative Indo-European ritualistics.

1. Introduction

Historians of religions have used the term “Indo-European” in discussions of shared features which are not the result of loan or *universalia* in the indigenous religions of peoples speaking Indo-European languages in pre-Christian and pre-Islamic Eurasia. Despite the importance of such undertakings in the early history of our discipline, nothing is taken for granted as to this category any longer. Although Vedism and classical Hinduism still hold an important position in contemporary research, as do the religions of ancient Greece and Rome—both as foci of study in their own right and as a terminological reservoir still in use by all students of religion—the shared features rendering these religions “Indo-European” remain a controversial issue. There are his-

¹ The embryo of this article was presented at the IAHR congress in Durban, August 2000. I am indebted to Professor Norbert Oettinger at the Friedrich-Alexander-University, Erlangen-Nürnberg, for offering much thoughtful criticism on the article.

torical as well as methodological reasons for this scepticism. Without the anthropologically oriented rejection of Max Müller's comparative mythology during the late 19th century, the study of religions would not be what it is today. With some justification, many scholars still associate the study of Indo-European religions either with far-fetched comparativism (sometimes with an unmistakable political bias²) or with seclusive antiquarianism, lacking explanatory value in the study of living or historically documented religions. I will endeavour to adjust this picture by presenting some traits of cultural inheritance that appear to be less questionable. That is not to say that we will be dealing with "hard facts," but at least with a body of falsifiable assumptions which deserve serious consideration. The description is partly designed to serve as an introduction to the study of Indo-European religions, partly to encourage reconsideration among scholars who have rejected this approach as an impossible or dangerous task. In doing so, I also hope to show that the traits of religious heritage in the Indo-European

² As Bruce Lincoln convincingly demonstrates in his recent book *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship* (1999), the study of Indo-European myth has been (and to some extent still is) closely associated with a search for perfect centres and uncorrupted cultural identities engendered by the nationalist projects of post-Enlightenment Europe. This discourse found its modern articulation among philologists, philosophers, folklorists and artists such as William Jones, Johann Gottfried Herder, the Grimm brothers and Richard Wagner, but may be traced back to medieval scholars such as Giraldus Cambriensis and Snorri Sturluson, all of whom had more in mind than mere antiquarianism. Lincoln insists that the study of myth has its own mythic potentials, by means of which some of the most influential theories of myth may be approached as myths themselves, as "ideology in narrative form." I may be held guilty of participating (albeit unconsciously) in the discourse deconstructed by Lincoln, but still entertain the hope that ideology, understood as pretext, prologue or decoding, does not necessarily infect the body of data collected. That is to say that the ideological dimensions of scholarship do not rule out its heuristic potentials. I also assume that the "genealogy of discourse" as pursued by Lincoln himself need not be essentially different from a study of the Indo-European religious heritage. In both cases, recurrent motifs are traced through their different elaborations in time and space, not being taken as the result of imaginative universals, but as parts of the same trajectory (cf. Lincoln 1999:210).

corpus provoke methodological and theoretical considerations which are relevant to the study of religious persistence and traditionalism altogether.

Few would deny the accuracy of the comparative method as pursued in historical linguistics. The method allows students of language to compare and describe the development of linguistic items in any language family on the basis of regular sound shifts. Yet it is sometimes forgotten that the same method has rendered possible a comparative pragmatics, particularly as regards the study of metrics and poetic phraseology. On the basis of such comparisons, it seems obvious that the oldest Indo-European languages were not mere *adstrata* or *superstrata* among the peoples speaking them, because if the only connection between these peoples were of a linguistic nature, they would not compose poetry according to similar aesthetic principles, nor would they adopt the same formulas in legal processes or address the same gods in their prayers. The common religious vocabulary (including priestly titles, religious concepts and names of gods) was not a matter of loan, because it cannot be distinguished from other vocabularies in terms of linguistic development. Scepticism is more motivated when it comes to comparing rituals or mythical motifs where such shared linguistic traits are not extant. A thematic similarity may be striking enough, but should not be taken as a proof of heredity unless the notion of secondary creation or loan appears less convincing. In rare cases, formal regularities may be due to chance as well, because the pronouncement of globally attested notions or “floaters” in languages belonging to the same family invites the possibility of coincidence.³ To avoid such pitfalls, evidence must be based on the singular detail, be it a matter of formulaics, stylistic peculiarities or

³ Some notable examples were collected in Schulze 1968 [1921]:34f. Having pointed to the accidental coincidence of Latin and Lithuanian clauses in the Lithuanian translation of the New Testament, he concluded: “Natürlich ist es Zufall, der solche Reihen bildet: altererbt ist an ihnen nur der lexikalische Rohstoff, nicht seine sinnvolle Verknüpfung. Aber es bleibt doch wohl für derartige Spiele des Zufalls das Material so bequem bereitstellt.”

instances of obsolescence. A comparison may in fact be particularly promising if the *comparanda* have been subjected to decoding, by means of which the thematic subtexts have drifted apart, only leaving the formal surface intact.

This procedure is demonstrated by Calvert Watkins in a recent study (Watkins 1995), half of which is devoted to the formal and semantic modulations of the Indo-European dragon-slaying myth. By proceeding from the basic formula HERO SLAY (*g^{wh}en-) DRAGON, Watkins shows that this quasi-universal motif had a recognizable Indo-European realization (with marked word order and vocabulary). These features have rendered it possible to study how the motif drifts between different genres (from the myths of Hittite Illuyankaš and Indo-Iranian **ur̥tra* to the Roman *ludi saeculares* and Old High German spells) without losing its original qualities. In the mid-seventies, the same scholar offered another interesting contribution to the study of Indo-European mythical phraseology, “La famille indo-européenne de grec ὄρχις” (1975). The article was important in many respects, not least because it confirmed that Indo-European poetics may be pursued beyond the sentence level. This was done by focusing multipartite metaphors or verbal collocations with emphasis on the preservation of marked vocabulary and recognizable stylistic features. The undertaking should not be confused with the search for recurrent mythical themes, because it is precisely *not* the attention drawn to thematic deep-structures, but rather to formulaic artifacts undergoing change and dissolution in different texts, during different periods and in different societies, that makes Watkins’ study so important for the understanding of myth. Those objecting that poetic language is just the arbitrary medium of myth should find it difficult to demonstrate how the myths in Vedic India or Greece were just floating around under a screen of rigid stylistic criteria, that they were elaborations of blunt and amorphous narratives existing outside the frames of ritual or epic performance. The insistence on form in traditional mythopoeia cannot be refuted unless the epistemological problems raised by the notion of a pure plot, the diction or performance of which is irrelevant or circumstantial, have been solved.

2. *Heritage as footprint*

Before turning to the description of the religious heritage we must also consider how its transmission was conceptualized. Instances of poetic self-reflexivity in the orally transmitted poetry of Vedic India offer interesting insights in this respect. They may help us to explain the mutually diverse and consistent character of the surviving materials. Metaphoric references to the poet's task and the character of poetic speech were not only another means of expressing one's genius and versatility; such metaphors were also modes of inference regarding already established ritual conventions, the preferred basis of which was observations made in daily life. As demonstrated in a recent study by George Thompson, an important focus of Vedic ritual hermeneutics was the observation that, just as humans and animals may be traced through the footprints they leave on the ground, the gods may be traced through the footprints they left in the verbal and kinetic precedents of memorized ritual. Hence the poet was held to be a *padajñá* or "track-seeker." According to the competitive tradition of Vedic poetry, the footprint or *padá* was regarded as a hidden message to be deposited in the poem.⁴ The constraints of form and the freedom of innovation were perfectly balanced by the Vedic poets, who explicitly confirm that they belong to a particular tradition or "decorate songs aided by a former expression of thought" (RV 8,6,11). A similar notion is found in Pindar, who claims that "the older poets found a highway of song" in the epic deeds of the past, and that he will follow along, making this highway his "own concern" (αὐτὸς . . . μελέταν) (*Nem.* 6.53–54).

These independent voices of the past confirm that the student of Indo-European myth is not facing divergent manuscripts reflecting a textual archetype, but rather the local variability of competing mythical motifs transmitted orally. While manuscripts are transcribed without any active involvement of the scribe as to their content, the oral poet has to apply the same hereditary conventions in different ritual contexts, meet changing social expectations and strive towards

⁴ Thompson 1995:94.

originality. Even though the poetry was traditional in its essence, it was constantly in the making. Recent anthropological research suggests that the veracity of tradition does not lie in its ability to encode semantic memory data, but in its ability to store events as such.⁵ This circumstance has also rendered traditions particularly effective means of manipulation and persuasion, because they may be decoded without losing their veracity, nourished by the force still holding them in common trust: the givenness of the past.⁶ Since the Vedic conception of open-ended “footprints” or “verbal precedents” is seen to fit the much more recent attempts to theorize the nature of orally transmitted traditions, the prospect of successfully applying this perspective to the data to be presented here seems all the more promising.

3. *Fragments of an Indo-European pantheon*

3.1. *The Götterfamilie*

Amongst the more convincing evidence for a rudimentary Indo-European religious heritage is a group of deities whose names have a plausible Indo-European etymology and whose positions in the individual pantheons are comparable. The genealogical structure is indicated by complementary epithets such as “father,” “daughter,” “son,” and “grandson,” but the members also communicate by means of other characteristics. The basic *reflexes* are found in the Vedic hymns, Greek epic and the Latvian *Dainas*. By drawing on and slightly modifying earlier attempts to interpret its structure,⁷ I suggest that the family had the following structure:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{F: } *d\acute{i}\acute{e}us\ ph_2t\acute{e}r \mid \text{M: } *diu\acute{o}neh_2 \\ \text{D: } *diu\acute{o}s\ d^hugh_2t\acute{e}r = *h_2eus\acute{o}s \text{ S1: } *diu\acute{o}s\ putl\acute{o}s = \end{array}$$

⁵ Boyer 1991:42.

⁶ Shils 1981:195.

⁷ Cf. Euler 1986, and Dunkel 1988–1990. Dunkel introduced the notion of a “Heavenly Spouse” (see below) as an alternative to the often postulated “Mother Earth,” but regarded **perk^wúh₃nos* as an original epithet of **d\acute{i}\acute{e}us*. In the case of **uorunos* he also argued for an old epithet of **d\acute{i}\acute{e}us*. I prefer a different model since the partial merger of these deities is only discernible in Greek myth.

perk^wúh₃nos* [+ W] SS2: **diuós népoth₁e*/diuós suHnú*
 [+ **seh₂uelios_{io} d^hugh₂tēr*]

F: Father Heaven | M: Spouse of Heaven

D: Heaven's daughter = Dawn S1: Heaven's son =

Oak-god [+ W] SS2: Heaven's grandsons/sons (the Dioscuri)
 [+ Sun's daughter]

(F = father, M = mother, D = daughter, S = son,
 SS = sons, W = wife.)

To this set should be added another, only vaguely discernible solar family, the female member of which (Sun's daughter) becomes the bride or companion of the Divine Twins. The head of this family, **seh₂uelios*, was perhaps perceived as the son of **diéús* (see below):

F: **seh₂uelios* | M ?

D **seh₂uelios_{io} d^hugh₂tēr* [+ **diuós népoth₁e*/**diuós suHnú*]

F: Sun-god | M ?

D: Sun god's daughter [+ Heaven's grandsons/sons]

Some further deities or semi-deities, which do not fit into this family, have been identified as Indo-European. When making such claims, one should also look for complementary characteristics in order to exclude secondary creation. By way of example, the possible Greek and Vedic namesakes Helen and Saranyū (**seleneh₂* (or **s_ueleneh₂*) and **seleniuh₂*) are mutually associated with the Divine Twins, sons of the sky-god **diéús*. Furthermore, the two major continuators of **diéús*, Zeus and Dyaus, are both evoked as "father (and) creator" (**ph₂tér* **génh₁tōr*). In such cases, the parallelism is simply too striking to be coincidental. What remains problematic is the fact that a divine name in one corpus may appear as an epithet or attribute in another. This problem will not be further discussed in this study, but should be borne in mind whenever a divine name is reconstructed.

3.2. A note on Dumézil

Many modern students of Indo-European religions have regarded linguistic approaches as misleading or superficial, not because they distrust the etymological method, but because they assume that the real constants of religious heritage have been subjected to linguistic overlap. Leaning on the theories developed by Georges Dumézil, they arrange the gods of individual pantheons in accordance with an implicit ternary structure reflected in the mythology, social organization, medicine, canonical lists, etc. of different Indo-European peoples: 1) bifocal sovereignty, consisting of a) an esoteric and malevolent aspect and b) a political and benevolent aspect; 2) physical force, especially warfare; 3) fertility, especially richness and health. Since they are based on deep-seated ideological structures rather than linguistic evidence,⁸ Dumézil's conclusions are extremely difficult to falsify. Although it is justified to separate divine names from functional constants, this does not render the linguistic evidence less interesting, nor should the relativization of function in divine onomastics incite us to look for such constants elsewhere. If the semantic ambiguity of heritage has turned traditions into ideal means of persuasion and manipulation, the assumption that there was an Indo-European ideology (an Indo-European mode of analysis) results in an unsatisfactory circularity, because if the mode of analysis as well as its point of departure was hereditary there is nothing to explain why changes have occurred at all. The structural affinities observed by Dumézil should perhaps not be reduced to a scholarly illusion. Yet it seems more favourable to approach them as independent elaborations of heritage emerging from similar historical circumstances.

Even though there is nothing to prevent us from imagining a prehistoric prototype underlying some of the divine lists or pairs analysed in the works of Dumézil—for example the gods of the

⁸ Ironically enough, before giving up the etymological method in favour of the search for functional matches, Dumézil made a number of misguided equations (*flāmen/brahmán*, *gandharvá-/Κένταυροι*) which seem to have played a decisive role in the development of his new method.

Šuppiluliuma/Mattiya treaty (Mi-it-ra-aš-ši-il, A-ru-ua-na-aš-ši-il, In-da-ra, Na-ša-at-ti-ia-an-na) or the Vedic pair Mitra-Varuṇa and the complementary Scandinavian gods Týr and Óðinn (Proto-Germanic *Tīwaz and *Wōðanaz)—we do not have to assume that this prototype reflected the same mode of analysis in all its historical manifestations. While Mitra personified the contract among the Indo-Iranians, *Tīwaz was rather perceived as a god of war among the earliest Germanic tribes. Nevertheless, the supposition that *Tīwaz formed a pair with *Wōðanaz remains attractive. There is more than structural co-occurrence to suggest that Varuṇa and *Wōðanaz developed from the same prototype, for which see below. By combining these pairs and balancing their names with Indo-European divine onomastics (*Tīwaz < *d̥iēūs, Varuṇa < *uorunos), supposing that Mitra and *Wōðanaz were secondary creations among the Indo-Iranian and Germanic peoples respectively, the result is a divine pair personifying the diurnal and nocturnal aspects of the sky, *d̥iēūs and *uorunos. This connotation survived as a fossil in Greek epic (see below) and in the Vedic hymns,⁹ for which see, in particular, *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda* (AVP) 2,65,1ab(c):

*bṛhat te varcaḥ prathathām upa dyām | mitrebhya edhi surabhis suvarcāḥ adhi
te rājā varuṇo bravītu | tasmā u tvaṃ haviṣā bhāgadā asah . . .*

Wide shall your splendour spread to the sky/Dyaus (*dyām*) be you good-smelling and good-shining to the friends (*mitrebhya*), king Varuṇa shall say to you: therefore be you with the sacrifice a provider of prosperity . . .

As regards the second function (physical force) as personified in Vedic and Germanic religion by Indra and *Þunraz according to Dumézil, it would likewise be possible to postulate a common prototype behind its local continuators. Gods of thunder and opponents of a cosmic serpent comprising the waters of heaven or surrounding the ocean, they both shared important features with a less dominant figure in the two traditions, *perk^uh₃nos (Old Norse Fjörgynn and Vedic Parjanya [see below]). This god had a female counterpart identified

⁹ 2,1,7 (cf. Dumézil 1948:90f.); for other passages in AVP see 72,2; 80,2.

with the earth, perceived as his bride in Vedic¹⁰ and his mother in Germanic (Fjörgyn = “Þórr’s mother” or “Earth”). The Balkan Slavs celebrated him (Perun^o) and his female counterpart (*Perperuna) in ritual calls for vital rain, during which the female was represented by a virgin who had not yet had her first monthly period.¹¹ The last detail is important, because the earth is referred to as “menstruating” (*ṛtviyāvatī*) in a Vedic hymn to Parjanya (AVP 2,70,2). Although associated with heavenly violence, **perk^wúh₃nos* seems bound up with fertility rather than with military force. When regarding the killing of a giant serpent as the emblematic deed of an archetypical warrior, one should also bear in mind that the most familiar instances of such motifs occur in fairy-tales and heroic epic, in which the agents are humans, heroes or semi-deities operating in a historical or quasi-historical landscape.

The third function in the structure postulated by Dumézil had several different manifestations in the individual cultures. If we consider the Mitannian treaty mentioned above, however, this position was taken up by the Divine Twins, realized in Vedic as the Nāsatyā (“Rescuers” [cf. Gr. σωτηρες]), Áśvinā (“Horsemen” [cf. Gr. ἑὺπλοι]) or Divó nāpātā (“grandsons of Dyaus” [cf. Gr. Διὸς κοῦροι]). The most persistent features of these figures were not their association with fertility, but their soteriological (particularly as patrons of seafarers and rescuers of shipwrecked mortals) as well as erotic and nuptial aspects.

By paying particular attention to its Vedic realization, the ternary structure underlying the list of gods in the Mitannian treaty could thus correspond to the following prototype:

- 1a. **d̥iē^us* ≠ b. **uorunos*
2. **perk^wúh₃nos* = **diuós putlós*
3. **diuós népoth₁e*

¹⁰ AVP 2,63,3; 70,2; AV 12,1,12.

¹¹ Jakobson 1985a:21.

If there is any logic to this structure, it does not bring to mind the functional strata discussed by Dumézil: “sovereignty” may seem a fitting label for the first stratum, but “fertility” belongs to the second rather than to the third.¹² On the other hand, the hypothetical structure reflects a mutual genealogical and spatial continuity: 1) Two complementary deities personifying the diurnal and nocturnal sky; 2) an atmospheric deity perceived as the son of the diurnal sky; and 3) the Divine Twins, grandsons of the diurnal sky, active on sea. Although purely hypothetical, the mere possibility of such a prototype suggests that the *idéologie tripartite*, instead of being hereditary in itself, was nothing but a characteristic mode of decoding a common heritage resulting from similar social and economic conditions.

3.3. The individual gods

Without claiming exhaustiveness, I present here the major members of the pantheon by pointing to some salient features. The description may appear somewhat stiff to readers acquainted with the historically attested religions from which the materials were drawn. As pointed out above, however, I have only intended to sketch the outlines of a heritage. This means that I have tried to leave as much space as possible for the dynamics of individual cultures in their socio-political diversity. For the purpose of making the presentation more accessible, technical details concerning etymology and textual criticism are found in the footnotes.

a. **d̥i̯éus*

He dwelled in the background of more active gods described as his descendants. He “smiled (**smei-*) through the clouds” (RV 2,4,6*d*),¹³ a feature he may have shared with his children **h₂eus̥ós* and **perk^wúh₃nos*. Vedic, Iranian, Greek and perhaps Roman data attest that he was addressed as **ph₂tér* **génh₁tōr*, “father (and) procre-

¹² Just as it was supposed to have served as a process of “glissement” among the Germanic peoples See Dumézil 1977:189 and Bernfried Schlerath’s critical approach to the model (1996:51).

¹³ Discussion in Dunkel 1988–1990:9.

ator.”¹⁴ He personified the diurnal sky and was possibly perceived as a benevolent counterpart of the nocturnal **uorunos*. Greek data attest that Zeus brings on the day (**ἥμαρ ἐπάγων*¹⁵) in contrast to Uranos who brings on the night (*νύκτ’ ἐπάγων*, Hes. *Th.* 176), indicating that the two gods were once regarded as complementary. A similar symbolism is well attested as regards Mitra and Varuṇa in Vedic (see above). In his role as a distant father and creator, recalling the typical features of a *deus otiosus*, Vedic Dyaus may in fact exhibit older characteristics than those of Greek Zeus or Roman Jupiter. These have more in common with **perk^wúh₃nos*. If already functionally weak at an early date, the Indo-European sky-god could easily have been subjected to amalgamation in Greece and Rome (cf. in particular Zeus Keraunos and Jupiter Tonans).¹⁶ Nevertheless, the inactivity of Vedic Dyaus in his capacity as a typical *deus otiosus* should not be exaggerated. Except for his mating with Prthivī (“Earth”) (referred to by Jaan Puhvel

¹⁴ Schmitt (1967:§291) found an extended variant of the formula **ph₂tér *génh₁tōr* in RV 1,164,33a (*dyáur me pitā janitā*) and Eurip. *Ion* 136 (Φοῖβός μοι γενέτωρ πατήρ), tentatively **diēus *moi *ph₂tér *génh₁tōr* “Dīēus (is) my father and creator.” Accidental as it may be (so the author thinks), the coincidence may still be considered to reflect fragments of an archaic oath or prayer. Noteworthy in this context is also RV 3,54,9ab: *sānā purāṇām ādhy emy ārān mahāḥ pitūr janitūr jāmi tām naḥ* | “From afar I perceive the things of the past: This is our descent from the great father, from the procreator.”

¹⁵ Cf. Hom. *Od.* 18.137; Archil. 68. For further references see Martin West’s commentary to Hes. *Th.* 176 (West 1966:218).

¹⁶ Lotte Motz (1998) draws critical attention to the notion of an Indo-European sky-god in a recent article. Despite some interesting points, many of her arguments fail to convince me and are to some extent inconclusive. That the proposed continuators of **diēus* in Vedic, Greek, Roman and Germanic religions do not share the same functions is not a new observation, nor an argument against the proposition that they should be conceived of as kindred. In some cases, Motz even tries to support her thesis with observations that could, had she just been more careful in her comparisons, be used to strengthen the opposite thesis. The conception of Jupiter as a personification of the thunderstone, referred to by Motz to demonstrate that this deity was not regarded as “a luminary of the sky” by the Romans, is in fact supported by the Vedic notion of a “heavenly thunderbolt” (RV 1,176,3d: *divyévāśānir*, *et passim*).

“as his only mythic function”¹⁷), there is at least one further myth in which he actively, albeit dysfunctionally, participates. The oldest versions describe how he once approached his own daughter, Uṣas, in the appearance of a bull, how he more or less successfully tried to rape or seduce her and how he was punished for the act by the other gods. As I have tried to show elsewhere, this myth may shed new light on the birth of the Ásvinā and the Greek Dioskouroi.¹⁸

b. **diuōneh₂*

The spouse of **diē₂us*.¹⁹ She is only familiar through vague reflexes, but seems to be a more plausible partner of **diē₂us* than the often hypothesized “Mother Earth,” who, if prototypical at all, rather belonged to the sphere of **perk^wuh₃nos*.

c. **uorunos*

This god personified the firmament or dwelled in the night sky. The names of his Vedic and Greek continuators, Varuṇa and Uranos (οὐρανός [Aeolic ὀρανός]), are likely to be formed on a verbal root (**uer-*) meaning “to cover” and a suffix (**-no-*) denoting worldly or heavenly dominion. One may think of him as the personification of the sky in its appearance as a dark cover. Even though the etymological connection of the two names was considered untenable for nearly a century, it has recently proved to be perfectly sound.²⁰ It is even backed up by some further characteristics of the god in Greek and

¹⁷ Puhvel 1987:59.

¹⁸ See Jackson, forthcoming.

¹⁹ Dunkel 1988–1990.

²⁰ George Dunkel (1988–1990) has argued for an etymological connection between Várūṇa and οὐρανός, interpreting *várūṇa* as a synchronic continuator of the Vedic stem *varu-* (< Proto-Indo-European **uoru-*) “to encompass, cover,” surviving with different syllabization (**uorū-*) in οὐρανός. For similar formations, note especially the nouns *varūtí*, *várūthā* and the adjective *varūthía*. Cf. RV 5,46,5d: *varūthíyaṃ várūṇo* ~ 8,101,5c: *varūthíyaṃ várūṇe*. The last pāda is particularly significant since the adjectives *sacathía* (“friendly”) and *varūthía* (“protecting, covering”) are used to create a contrast between Mitra/Aryaman and Varuṇa. The etymology implies qualitative Ablaut *várūṇa*/**vārūṇa* (cf. *ápas*/**āpas*) (= **ueruno-*, **uoruno-*), Gr. **ἔρανός*/Aeolic ὀρανός (cf. ἐχρυσός/ὀχρυσός) (= **ueruno-*, **uoruno-*). This is compatible with the view

Vedic poetry: he was “wide” or “wide-looking” (**uérH-*), he bound or seized his victims (δέω Hes. *Th.* 502,²¹ *grbhñāti* RV 1,24,12,13), he *had* or *was* a heavenly “seat” (**sédos*), the starry sky was his cloak and the stars his heavenly spies (*spásas* RV 1,25,13; 7,87,3).²² Zaraθuštra’s Ahura Mazdā is likely to have emerged from the pre-

of M. Kümmel in Rix *et al.* 1998, 625f., who reconstructs an Indo-European root **uer-* “aufhalten, (ab)wehren” preserved in Greek and subjected to merger with **uel-* “einschließen, verhüllen” and **Huer-* “stecken” in Indo-Iranian. This merger is controversial, however, as can be seen in the discussions in Mayrhofer 1992–96 s.v. VAR², as well as Schmidt 2000, and Lubotsky 2000. The name *varuṇa-* has also been connected with **uel-* “to see” (cf. Jakobson 1985a:33–43), but because of the common features of Varuṇa and Uranos I prefer Dunkel’s etymology.

²¹ The myth of Uranos in Hesiod (esp. the “Succession Myth” in the *Theogony*) has close parallels in the mythology of the Near East, clearly indicating that Hesiod was familiar with one or more of its sources. The most striking parallels occur in the Hurritic myth of Kumarbi surviving in Hittite adaptations from the archives in Boğazköy. Using data from this narrative in the *Theogony* when arguing for an Indo-European heritage consequently becomes a delicate matter. As regards the binding of the Kyklopes (or Uranids) by Uranos, however, a certain incongruity occurs in the story. It was already recognized by Apollodorus, who tried to rationalize it in his mythography. In Hesiod, the concealed children of Uranos are said to have been released by Kronos, but the Kyklopes and Hundred-Handers (also sons of Uranos) are said to have been released by Zeus. West treated this incongruity in his commentary to the *Theogony* (West 1966:139–53), concluding that some kind of lapsus was at stake. It seems plausible that Hesiod was drawing on and trying to synthesize different narratives, one (or some) of which was not related to the oriental “Succession Myth,” but had its roots in an indigenous myth about Uranos. Furthermore, the Uranids are “concealed” (157: ἀποκρύπτω) in earth, not bound by Uranos before being released by Kronos through castration. The nocturnal aspect of Uranos (176: νύκτ’ ἐπάγων) is not attested in the oriental versions, where the Babylonian sky-god Anu takes the position of Uranos.

²² Textual support for the etymological matches encountered: 1) **uérH-* RV 1,25,5.16: *vāruṇam* ... *urucākṣasam* ~ οὐρανός εὐρύς. Cf. Dunkel 1988–1990:3. 2) **sédos* RV 8,41,9: *vāruṇasya dhruvām sadaḥ* ~ Hes. *Th.* 128: οὐρανόν ... ἔδος ἀσφαλές. 3) The notion that the starry sky was the cloak of **uorunos* is supported by evidence from RV 1,25,13, Yt 13,3, and Kritias (= Euripides [?]) fr. B25 DK (see below for further discussion).

Zoroastrian counterpart of Vedic Varuṇa.²³ As a patron of poets, **uorunos* was probably the hypostasis of Germanic **Wōðanaz*. Both Varuṇa and Óðinn (**Wōðanaz*) are affiliated with the poet, whom they invest with a particular kind of poetic formulation known as **b^hreǵ^h*- (Vedic *bráhman*, Old Norse *bragr*).²⁴ Furthermore, the semantics and formation of the Germanic name (**u-* + suffix *-no-*) are comparable with those of Vedic Varuṇa (*ápi* [. . .] *vátantas* RV 7,60,6).

Further characteristics of this nocturnal deity are suggested in hereditary phraseology (see below).

d. **perk^wúh₃nos*

The son of **diéus* (RV 7,102,1), god of rain and thunder. He was evoked as “Oak-god” or “Striker.” Provided that the different for-

²³ Humbach and Skjærvø (1991) try to revise the old hypothesis that Ahura Mazda is a transformation of “a Proto-Iranian equivalent of the Rigvedic god Varuṇa” by arguing that Ahura Mazda embodied features of different pre-Zoroastrian gods. Concepts and mythical achievements associated with him are attributed to other gods than Varuṇa in RV. E.g. Indra in 2,17,5 (“who holds the earth down below and the heavens [above] from falling? [*dyám avasrásaḥ*]”) as compared with Ahura Mazda in Y 43,2 (“he held the earth [*kasnā dərətā*], he supported the heaven [to prevent it] from falling [*nabāscā auuapastōiš*]”). Not only does this argument seem inconclusive, because the same goes for Varuṇa in 4,42,4b (“I held the heaven [*dhārayam divam*] in the seat of truth”), but the general assumption that the different gods were associated with the same concepts and mythical achievements only proves that these concepts and achievements were not intimately associated with a particular god. On the other hand, when it comes to *ṛtá-/aša*, the attribution does not seem to be likewise arbitrary. Another important detail is the Young Avestan dvandva *miθra ahura* (Y 2,11; cf. the salient Vedic dvandva *mitrá-váruṇau*). Humbach and Skjærvø justly insist that Ahura Mazda should be treated as a new god in his own right, but as far as I can see this point of view does not affect the hypothesis that he developed from the same prototype as Vedic Varuṇa. In the former case, the god is approached from a synchronic perspective, proving him unique in comparison with another god, with whom he was once identical. Vedic Mitra, Iranian Miθra and Graeco-Roman Mithras should also be treated as gods in their own right, but the fact that they developed from the same prototype does not, for this reason, lose its interest or historical relevance.

²⁴ Regarding **b^hreǵ^h*- cf. RV 1,105,15: *bráhmā kṛṇoti váruṇo . . . vy ūrṇoti hṛdá matīm* ~ Hdl. 2–3: *Heriafōðr* (Óðinn) . . . *gefr* . . . *brag scáldom*.

mations of the name were still associated with the same god, we would be dealing with one of the most widely attested Indo-European theonyms (found in no less than 6 language families).²⁵ Like his father, he “smiled (**smei-*) down lightnings on earth” (AVP 2,70,1). He splintered an oak and “slayed” (**g^{wh}en-*) a giant serpent²⁶ (perhaps vaguely connected with **uorunos*), metonymically characterized by the “coils” (**b^heug^h-*²⁷) comprising or surrounding the heavenly wa-

²⁵ Despite involving the same verbal root (**per-*) and suffix (**-no-*), the different formations of this name are not identical. The Vedic, Slavic, Baltic and Germanic evidence allows us to distinguish at least three variants: **pergēnjo-* (Vedic *parjanya*, possibly Slavic **per(g)ynia* “wooded hill”), **peruh₃no-* (Russian *perun*) and **perk^wuh₃no-* (Lithuanian *perkūnas*, Old Norse *fiǫrgynn*). Onomatopoetic reformations (seen elsewhere in the treatment of words for thunder) may have played a part in the development of this lexical family. There is consequently no reason to insist on a common prototype without variants, but in consideration of the fact that Baltic formed a part of a Balto-Slavic continuum from which Germanic must be held separate, the coincidence of the Germanic and Baltic realizations speaks for **perk^wuh₃no-* as an early formation. I am indebted to Professor Norbert Oettinger for clarifications regarding these matters.

Apart from the Vedic, Slavic, Baltic and Germanic cognates, attention should be brought to Gr. Zeus κεραυνός (a possible substitution for **per(k)au₂nos*), Albanian *perëndi*, *perudi* “god, heaven,” a Thracian hero Περκος/Περκον, and *pērūne*, a god of war among the Kaffirs.

²⁶ Watkins 1995: *passim*.

²⁷ This metonymical characterization of the serpent occurs in Old Norse and Vedic respectively. In *Skaldskaparmál* 4, Eysteinn Valdason characteristically describes Þórr’s (*faðir Þrúðar*) fight against the Miðgarðsormr, here known as *baugr*:

Leitá bratrar brautar / baug hvassligum augum, / æstisk áðrat flausti / oggs búð, faðir Þrúðar.

Þrúð’s father looked with piercing eyes on steep-way’s [land’s] ring (*baug*) until red-fish’s dwelling [sea] surged over the boat. (tr. Anthony Faulkes)

A similar sense of *baugr* is only attested twice elsewhere in the poetic records, in *Háttalykill* 36b and *Merlínúspá* II 15, for which reason the usage should be regarded as highly marked, perhaps even archaic. Signs of a Vedic usage of much the same type (both pertaining to the etymology of the noun, the metonymical usage and the thematic context) is conspicuous with reference to the few attestations of the cognate

ters. He probably had a female counterpart identified with the earth, producing grain and cattle through mating with her. He carried an axe or a hammer with particular features, such as being yellow and 100(0)-bossed.²⁸ The names of his Celtic and Germanic (possibly Italic) continuators (*Punraz, Tanaris and Jupiter Tonans) all derived from the root **(s)tenh₂-* “to thunder” and may have arisen as the result of fossilization of an original epithet or epiklesis. Some Vedic passages (e.g. AVP 2,70,4) confirm that Vedic Parjanya was referred to as *stanayitnú-*, “Thunderer,” an epithet formed on the same root.²⁹ He was probably the hypostasis of the Anatolian Storm God (Hittite Tarḫunnaš, Luwian Tarḫunzaš), who likewise “slew” (**g^{wh}en-*) a serpent and whose name was formed on a root (**terh₂-* “to overcome” + the “Herrschersuffix” (**-no-*) of his hypostasis) belonging to the same semantic field as **g^{wh}en-* and used as an epithet of Indra in RV 6,20,2. As regards the historical manifestations of **perk^wúh₃nos*, they are obviously caught in a web of interrelated epithets which may only be

bhogá- (“windung, Biegung, Schlangenring” according to Mayrhofer 1992–96 s.v.) in RV. The following passage exhibits one of the most prevalent episodes in the whole corpus, that of Indra defeating Vṛtra in order to release the vital waters surrounded and confined by the snake. Not only has the parallel between this episode and that of Þórr’s struggle with the Miðgarðsormr frequently been drawn on a thematic level, but Indra and Þórr are also defined by means of similar, partly cognate noun phrases denoting “serpent’s killer,” *vṛtra-han-* (< **g^{wh}en-*) “Vṛtra’s bane” and *orms einbani* (< **g^{wh}en-* [*Hymiskviða* 22]) “the serpent’s single bane.” New support for the genetic priorities of such verbal messages is found in the passage where *bhogá-* maintains the same marked status as *baugr* in Eysteinn’s verse:

náva yád asya navatīm ca bhogā́n sākām vājreṇa maghāvā vivṛścāt |

When the Rewarder [Indra] cut up the ninety-nine coils [of Vṛtra] with the mace (RV 5,29,6a)

²⁸ Watkins 1995:429ff.

²⁹ Notable are also phrases such as *parjanya stanáyan hanti duṣkṛtaḥ* (RV 5,83,2d), “thundering, Parjanya strikes the evil-doers,” were the two characteristic roots **g^{wh}en-* and **(s)tenh₂-* co-occur. Except for Indra, Parjanya is to my knowledge the only deity to be associated with the formulaic constituents **g^{wh}en-* and **og^{wh}his* (cf. AVP 2,70,3).

successfully resolved by bringing in Vedic data regarding Indra and Parjanya.

e. **diuós népoth₁e*³⁰/**diuós suHnú*

The grandsons, sons or descendants of **diéús*. They woo or marry a solar female, preferably Sun's daughter (**seh₂ueliosio d^hugh₂tēr*), and sometimes appear as lovers or companions of Dawn. Although Greek epic exhibits typological parallels in this regard, as seen in the stories about Helen and the Dioskouroi, the name Helen (Ἑλένη) should not be compared with Sūryā as suggested by Jaan Puhvel. Vittore Pisani was probably much closer to the truth when assuming an etymological connection between Helen and Saranyū, the mythical mother of the Aśvins.³¹ The Divine Twins sometimes appear as personifications of the morning- and evening-star in Vedic,³² a view which also left traces in Greek and Baltic.³³ They were healers and helpers, particularly in cases of maritime distress, travelling in miraculous vehicles and rescuing shipwrecked mortals. The latter motif may have been decoded as epic return in Greek (see below).

³⁰ The plural should probably be *népoth₁e* and not *népōth₁* as suggested by Dunkel (1988–1990).

³¹ The names Helen and Saranyū could, despite Mayrhofer's scepticism, reflect two similar prototypes: **seleneh₂* and **selen(i)uh₂s* (← **sel-*) as argued by Vittore Pisani 1969. Following up Kuhn's old etymology, Pollomé suggested **seren(i)uHs* without giving any semantic motivation for bringing Vedic *√sar* (*sísarti*), the verb underlying the name Saranyū, together with a Proto-Indo-European **ser-*. The current Vedic verb most likely belongs to the family of Gr. ἄλλομαι and Lat. *salio* (cf. Mayrhofer 1992–96 s.v., and Rix *et al.* 1998 s.v.), hence PIE **sel-*. The set of Greek and Vedic myths compared by Pisani display interesting contrasts and parallels which deserve serious reconsideration. For a discussion of thematics (without attention brought to the etymological conditions) see Grottanelli 1986. New evidence is presented in Jackson (forthcoming).

³² Mayrhofer 1992–96, 2:39, referring to T. Gotō.

³³ Cf. Puhvel 1987:228f.

f. **h₂eusós*

The daughter of **diéus*. She was identified with the dawn and possessed the characteristic “smile” of her father and brother.³⁴ Her erotic nature (**uénos* “desire”) was preserved in Vedic (RV 1,172,1a), but was most likely subjected to overlap (Aphrodite [< Phoenecian Astorit]) and fossilization (Venus < **uénos*) in Greek and Roman mythology.³⁵ Greek data relate the epithet **diuós d^hugh₂tēr* to poetic inspiration (cf. the Muse Kalliope), with which the Vedic continuator of **h₂eusós* (Uṣas) was also associated. Euripides characteristically describes Eos as “bringing light and chasing away the stars” (ἥ τε φασφόρος Ἐως διώκουσ’ ἄστρα *Ion* 1156f.). Similar images not very surprisingly recur in Vedic, yet here with the verb *bādhate* “press, force” (cf. RV 1,92,5; 6,65,2). Besides the often focalized Vedic, Greek, Roman and Baltic continuators of this goddess, a possible member of the same group occurs as a vague reflex in West Germanic sources. The figure is hinted at in the indigenous name for the Christian *pascua*, i.e. Easter, first referred to by Beda in *De temporum ratione* C 15: Eostor-monath. Cf. also Old High German *ōstara*.

g. **seh₂uelios*³⁶

Personification of the sun. He may have been regarded as the son of **diéus*,³⁷ which means that the Divine Twins were wooing or marrying their own cousin, Sun’s daughter. A famous Graeco-Vedic equation describes him as “spy (**spókos*) of all beings.”³⁸ The metaphorical characterization of the sun-disk as his “wheel” (**k^wek^wlós*) in Vedic, Greek and Germanic should perhaps be understood as a reference to the wheel of his chariot, in which he crossed the sky. A Graeco-Vedic match meaning “great path” (tentatively **h₂oǵmos* **megóh₂s*) may originally

³⁴ Discussion in Dunkel 1988–1990.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ The variant used above, **seh₂uelios*, is seen in Gr. ἥλιος, while Vedic *sūrya* reflects the variant **sh₂ulios* (with metathesis: **suh₂lios*).

³⁷ Cf. RV 10,37,1 and 1,160,3.

³⁸ *h.* in *Dem.* 62, and RV 4,13,3 *et passim*.

have denoted the path of the horses of his chariot.³⁹ His association with cattle is indicated by vague reflexes of the epic butchering of the cattle of Helios (Hom. *Od.* 12.194–196), in a passage from the *Greater Bundahišn*,⁴⁰ Vedic Sūrya milking the cattle of heaven and earth (RV 1,160,3)⁴¹ and the mother of Helios, Euryphaëssa, described as being “cow-eyed” (βοῶπις *h.Hom.* 31,2, elsewhere a salient epithet of Hera).⁴² An Indo-European taboo regarding “urinating standing up” (**h₃meiǵ^h- *urHd^huos*) clearly involved the sun,⁴³ but need not have pertained to the personified sun.

h. **seh₂ueliosiod^hugh₂tēr*

See above (e).

i. **pl^hth₂uih₂-*

A goddess identified with or sprung from the earth. The onomastic evidence is limited (cf. Vedic *pr̥thivī*, Gr. (derived) Πλάταια/Πλαταιαί, OE *folde* ... *mōdor* and ON *fold*), but clearly suggests a divine epithet. The name is derived from a metaphorical designation of the earth as “broad.” Despite the lack of etymological transparency (save for the element **pl^hu-* “much” in Greek and Old Norse), Vedic, Greek and Old Norse data indicate that she was referred to as “much-nourishing” or “rich-pastured” (*pr̥thivīm viśvādhāyasam* RV 2,17,5, χθονὶ πολυβοτείρῃ and *fiolnýta fold* Sd. 4⁴⁴). The argument that she

³⁹ Cf. RV 4,53,4 and *h.Hom.* 32,11. Discussion in Watkins 1995:16.

⁴⁰ Discussion in Lincoln 1999:183ff.

⁴¹ Cf. also 164,17 and 5,47,4. The “milking of heaven” is alluded to elsewhere, e.g. in RV 1,100,3; 2,3,6; 3,57,2; 9,107,5. As first suggested by Charpentier in 1932, this RVedic notion may shed light upon a metaphorical expression familiar from Greek epic, νυκτὸς ἀμελγῶ “during the milking of night.”

⁴² As regards Euryphaëssa, Campanile (1994:35ff.) argued that she originally represented Dawn (Gr. ἠώς), comparing the name with a related epithet of Vedic Uṣas, *vibhātī* “resplendissante.” This would make Dawn the mother of **seh₂uelios*, for which Campanile claims to have found Vedic evidence (RV 7,78,3).

⁴³ Cf. in particular WD 727; AV 7,102; AV 3,1,66. See also Watkins 1995:14.

⁴⁴ Durante 1968:308. I am indebted to Professor Anders Hultgård for bringing my attention to the latter *comparandum*.

was the logical equivalent of **d̥iēūs ph₂tēr* is based on a hypothetical juncture (**pl̥h₂uih₂- méHter* “Mother Earth”) only weakly supported by the sources.⁴⁵ As pointed out above, however, she is a more fitting partner of **perk^wúh₃nos* than of **d̥iēūs*. The original name of this goddess may have been lost at an early date, but could still be hinted at in feminizations such as Old Norse Fjörgyn or Slavic **Perperuna*.

A group of gods and semi-deities without any obvious association with the “Götterfamilie” may be added to this list. Some of the conjectures should be treated with caution since based on new evidence or a very limited body of data.

j. **(H)iemós*

“Twin.” Primordial being or mythical mortal. Among the Indo-Iranians he was regarded as one of the first mortals and a king of the underworld, himself the son of another mythical king, Indo-Iranian **uiuasuant-*. He was dissected or dismembered (for a crime or sin he committed during the time of his reign) and treated as a sacrificial animal (preferably a cow⁴⁶). Although the Iranian data suggests an etiology of death, Germanic reflexes of a similar motif, where **(H)imios* (ON Ymir) appears in the role of a primordial giant, indicate that the dismemberment had a cosmogonic subtext.⁴⁷ This subtext is also reflected by the basic verbs of the act of dismemberment in Iranian and Old Norse texts. There are no explicit references to a dismemberment of Vedic Yama, but attention should be brought to RV 10,13,4 (a hymn to the two sacrificial carts), where Yama is

⁴⁵ Discussion in Euler 1987:39ff.

⁴⁶ The word *gāuš* “cow” occurs side by side with Yima in Y 32,8. Humbach and Skjærvø 1991 discuss two possible interpretations, either “hero” (in a metaphorical sense) or “sacrificial animal.”

⁴⁷ The basic verb denoting sacrificial dismemberment may have been **(s)kert-* “to carve” (cf. Yt 19,46 *spitiuram(ca) yimō.karəntem* “Spitiura who dissected (→ miscreated) Yima,” with a Gmc. variant **skab^h-* “id.” (→ create) (Vm. 21 and elsewhere). The semantic development of both verbs testify to the creative force of destruction and subtraction. For further details see Lincoln 1997.

said to have “evacuated (or ‘transcended’)” his own body,⁴⁸ and to RV 10,52,3, where he is “smeared” ($\sqrt{a}ñj$, i.e. in a liturgical sense) by the gods, being constantly recreated by them and described as *havyaváh* or “bringing the oblation (to the gods).” Further elaborations of this motif in Roman pseudo-historiography (Romulus and Remus) and continental Germanic genealogy (Mannus and Tuisto) are open to discussion, although the etymological evidence is lacking and the sacrificial context must be extrapolated. The Vedic story of the mythical twins Yama (m.) and Yamī (f.), in which Yamī unsuccessfully tries to seduce her own brother, may belong to a different set or result from secondary creation.

k. **h₂ék^wōm népōt*

The different traditions surrounding this deity in Vedic, Avestan, Latin and Irish sources (see above: j) point to a “descendant of waters” associated with flooding and a luminous substance hidden in a body of water. The name of the god may be analysed stylistically as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, for which there is further support in the metaphorical expression *sævar niðr* (“descendant of the sea” = “fire”), preserved in the Old Norse poem *Ynglingatal*. In Yašt 19,51 this fiery substance was identified with the *x^varənah*, a problematic concept forming a part of the royal ideology of ancient Iran. The myth was studied in all its complexity by Dumézil 1973. An important detail regarding the Roman data was added by Jaan Puhvel (1973), who saw a reminiscence of the fiery aspects of Neptune in the expression *aquam exstinguere* “putting out water (i.e. as fire is put out)” as it was used in a pseudo-historic Roman myth associated with the festival of Neptunalia. The lack of the element **h₂ep-* (or **h₂ek^w-*) in the names of Neptune and Nechtan (“descendant”) remains problematic. The defect is the inverse in the name of Ægir (< **h₂ēk^wió-* “belonging to the sea”⁴⁹), the god of the sea in Old Norse literature. Although the sources are both too late and too sparse to distinguish Ægir as

⁴⁸ Discussion in Lincoln 1981:80.

⁴⁹ The Germanic reflexes of this Indo-European word for “water, sea,” etc. (with possible Vǫddhi-*Ableitung*) is discussed in Darms 1978:25ff.

a distant kin of the “descendants of the waters” with any certainty, there are still some motivic parallels which appear striking. Particular attention should be brought to a passage in Snorri Sturluson’s poetic manual *Skaldskaparmál* (31 [33]) relating a myth about Ægir as the explanation for a poetic expression for “gold,” *eldr ægis* or “the fire of Ægir,” in Skaldic poetry. According to this passage, Ægir once arranged a feast for the gods and carried luminous gold into the hall as a source of light. One may speculate that this late mythographic adaptation contains traces of pre-Christian Germanic lore which was encoded in the hermetic language of the Old Norse *skalds*.

l. **h₁ogni-*

The Vedic hymns ascribe great significance to a god Agni, understood as the embodiment of the sacrificial fire. The name is an animate (masculine) counterpart of the inanimate (neuter) word for “fire” (**peh₂ur*) also seen in Latin *ignis*, Lithuanian *ugnis* and Old Church Slavonic *ognь*. Even though the theonym was already lost in Iranian (shifting from **agni-* [cf. the Avestan name *Dāštāyni-*]⁵⁰ to *Ātr*), one should not rule out the idea that it was the name of an Indo-European deity. The assumption is supported by the fact that one of his Vedic epithets or aspects (*apām nápāt*) survived in the names of individual and typologically similar gods in Avestan (*apam napā*), Latin ([**aquārum*] *neptūnus*), and Old Irish Celtic (*nechtan*), for which see above (k).

m. **h₃rb^héu-*

Michael Estell has recently reconsidered the etymological connection between Orpheus and R̥bhu by showing that 1) in both traditions the figure was either regarded as the son of a cudgel-bearer (*vajrín* [= Indra] / Οἰαγρος) or an archer (*sudhánvan* / Apollo) and 2) known as a “fashioner” (**tetk-*). The name Οἰαγρος is analysed as “cudgel-bearer” with a first element reflecting a verb meaning “carry” (seen in οἶσω, the suppletive future of φέρω) and a second element mean-

⁵⁰ An Indo-Iranian prototype of this god is vaguely suggested by Old Indo-Aryan (?) *^Da-ak-ni-iš*. The name occurs in a Hittite text, but should probably be understood as an Indo-Aryan loan rather than as the name of an indigenous Anatolian deity.

ing “cudgel” (**ἄγρος*, as in **Μελεῖ ἄγρος* and *vájrah* < PIE **uaǵ-ro-*).⁵¹ The phonological match has long been recognized,⁵² but there would be no strong case for the idea of a common past without additional matches such as those pointed out by Estell. Convincing as they seem, Estell’s observations lead us to the traces of a mythical craftsman in Greek and Vedic who may have formed a part of the Indo-European religious heritage.

n. **péh₂usō(n)*

“Protector” (lit. “who is characterized by protecting”⁵³). This pastoral god survived as *Pūṣan* (protector of cattle, patron of thieves, etc.) in Vedic and *Pan* in Greek. Several features of *Pan*, whose cult was only kept alive in distant *Arkadia* during the classical period, were most likely taken over by *Hermes*. *Hermes* was originally an ithyphallic-apotropaic deity of lesser importance, whose typical features in later periods were blended with influences from the Near East. Seeing that he was regarded as the father of *Pan*, the connection with his antecedent left a genealogical trace similar to that of Old Norse *Þórr* (= *Fjörgyn*’s son). A possible hereditary feature is the goad (Vedic *áṣṭrā*, Greek *οἶστρος*), with which the god is wont to bait men and cattle. The result is a sudden horror without any perceivable cause, referred to by the Greeks as *πανικός*. The god may have had an unfortunate appearance which turned him into a marginal figure unworthy of sacrifice, per-

⁵¹ Estell 1999.

⁵² First by Christian Lassen in 1840 and later accepted by de Saussure in 1879 (references in Estell 1999). If the two names are related, the common basis would either be an otherwise unattested root **h₃reb^h*- or the less familiar **h₃erb^h*- “change sides/change allegiance” (zero-grade **h₃rb^h*-). The latter root was discussed (with particular stress on its reflexes in Hittite) in a lecture given by Craig Melchert at the University of Erlangen in April 2001. The core meaning of the root was first suggested orally to the lecturer by Calvert Watkins in 1968. As observed by graduate student Hisashi Miyakawa in connection with Melchert’s lecture, a root with the core meaning “change sides/change allegiance” would fit well into the pattern of the Vedic *Ṛbhavas*, who are rewarded with immortality by the gods as a result of their craftsmanship (cf. RV 3,60,3).

⁵³ “der durch Hütten Charakterisierte,” Oettinger 1998:545.

haps into a mediator between different cults. His animal was clearly the buck.^{54,55}

o. *promāth₂eu-*

A successful comparison may shed light upon obsolete linguistic features, such as the fossilization of epithets no longer understood in one or more of the traditions approached. By analysing the Vedic verb *mathnāti* as meaning “to rob, take away,” occasionally formed with the prefix *pra-*, and separating it from $\sqrt{\text{math}}$ “to stir,” Johanna Narten observed a similar compound in the Greek name Prometheus (Doric Προμαθεύς) no longer perceptible to the epic poets.⁵⁶ Since the verb left no traces elsewhere in the Greek language, it is not at all surprising that Hesiod and later authors, given the extant Greek verb *μανθάνω* “perceive, remark, notice,” analysed the name as meaning “Forethought.” Thanks to Narten’s comparison, we are now able to recognize a common core in the story of Prometheus and the Vedic story of Mātariśvan, who “robbed” (*mathnāti*, $\sqrt{\text{math-}}$) the heavenly fire and brought it to mankind.

⁵⁴ The basic studies of this Indo-European deity are Watkins 1970, Oettinger 1998 and Oettinger 2000.

⁵⁵ It is conceivable, if only a matter of speculation, that the hereditary formula **pah₂- *uiHro- *pek_u-* “protect men and cattle,” as reconstructed on the basis of Indic, Iranian, Umbrian and Latin evidence (Watkins 1995:197ff.), was somehow associated with the god **péh₂usō(n)*. The name Pūṣan and the root (**pah₂-*) on which the name was originally formed become the subject of verbal play in a hymn to the Viśve Devās (RV 1,89,5). In the same stanza we encounter the expression *jágasas tasthúṣas patīm* “lord of that which walks and stands,” seemingly including a merism of the type *púruṣān paśúmś ca* “men and cattle” (AV 3,28,5–6). In his capacity as protector (*rakṣitár*, *pāyúh*), Pūṣan is asked to increase (*várdhati*) property (*védas*):

*tám íśānam jágasas tasthúṣas patīm | dhiyamjinvám ávase hūmahe vayám | pūṣā
no yáthā védasām ásad vṛdhé | rakṣitā pāyur ádabdhah suastáye ||*

⁵⁶ Narten 1960.

4. *Mythical imagery*

I have already touched upon the conceptualization of heritage as footprint. Similar metalinguistic traditions allow us to distinguish the framing and prologues of specific genres, among which short references to a mythic and time-honoured past may have constituted a salient group. By using **men-*, a verbal root denoting “mental force,” or “memory,” at the beginning of such performances, the Indo-European poet also implied that he intended to tell the truth. The underlying logic was, with an example from Greek:

I remember (μυμνήσκω) → It is true
It is true ← It is not forgotten (ἀληθής)

Memory is an expected qualifier of truth in any society preserving its heritage through the sole medium of oral literature, because the only foundation of traditions held in common trust in such societies is the successful mnemotechnics of the tradents. More uniquely Indo-European in their particularities are the fragments of a hereditary gnomic and cosmological poetry (Y 44) introduced by stylistic figures of the type “this I ask thee” (**prek-*), “tell me plainly.”⁵⁷

Changing focus from the *means* of myth to its *ends*, one observes certain formal recurrences in the Indo-European corpus which could be approached as rudiments of myth. By drawing on Watkins’ analysis of the verbal collocation in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (*Op.*) and elsewhere, I have tried to show that the complex formula, ideally:

Unmarked verb, unmarked verb, marked verb (**h₁erg^h-*) + Wild/Domestic animals + Trees (**dru-*) + Mountains

is the encoded version of a microscopic myth decoded as an address to the trees of Tarḫunnaš in a Hittite royal-foundation text (KUB XXIX 1 I 28–31), as the convulsions of nature at Indra’s birth in the RV 4,17,2, as Boreas blowing over the earth in *Op.* 504–525, as the rushing, theriomorphic Odysseus in the *Iliad* 2,192–198 and the penetrating

⁵⁷ Discussion in Schmitt 1967:§573ff.

beams of Phoibos in a Pythian oracle (quoted by emperor Julian, *Ep.* 89a Bidez-Cumont; 299d Sp.).⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Watkins (1975) collected a number of parallels involving wild/domestic animals + trees + mountains + a verb of violent action (see also Oettinger [forthcoming]). I would bring particular attention to KUB XXIX 1 I 28–33, RV 4,17,2 and *Op.* 504–525, adding to the list *Il.* 3,192–198. The latter passage concerns Priam's parabolic statements about Odysseus on the battle-field below Troy, exhibiting some striking formal similarities with the passage in Hesiod without indicating the existence of a homerism in Hesiod (or vice versa):

*ne-pí-ša-aš kat-ta-an ú-li-li-iš-ki-id-du-ma-at UR.MAH-aš [(-ma-aš)] / kat-ta-an še-eš-ki-it UG.TUR[UR.TUG]-aš-ma-aš kat-ta-an še-eš-ki-it / har-tág-ga-aš-ma-aš-ma-aš ša-ra-a ar-ki-iš-ki-it-ta (< *h₁erǵ^h-) [nu-uš-ma-aš-za] / ^dU ad-da-aš-mi-iš pa-ra-a i-da-a-lu zi-ik-ki-it / [G]UD^{H.A} -uš-ma-aš-ma-aš kat-ta-an ú-e-ši-it-at UDU^{H.A}*

Under the heavens you thrive, the lion / would pair, the panther would pair by you, / but the bear would couple up against you; / the storm-god my father kept evil from you [tr. Jaan Puhvel 1991]. / The cattle pastured under you, the sheep / pastured under you. (KUB XXIX 1 I 28–33)

táva tviṣó jániman rejata dyáu réjad bhúmīr bhiyāsā svásya manyóḥ | rghāyānta subhvāḥ párvatāsa árdan dhánvāni saráyanta ápaḥ ||

From excitement of you (= Indra) heaven was trembling (injunctive) at your birth, the earth was trembling (inj.) with fear of your own wrath, the mighty mountains trembled with excitement (inj.), the lands shivered, the waters begin to flow. (RV 4,17,2)

μῆνα δὲ Ληναίωνα, κάκ' ἤματα, βουδόρα πάντα,
τοῦτον ἀλεύασθαι, καὶ πηγάδας, αἶ τ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν
πνεύσαντος Βορέοιο δυσηλεγέες τελέθουσιν,
ὅς τε διὰ Θρήκης ἱπποτρόφου εὐρεί πόντῳ
ἐμπνεύσας ὥρινε· μέμυκε δὲ γαῖα καὶ ὕλη·
πολλὰς δὲ δρῦς ὑψικόμους ἐλάτας τε παχείας
οὔρεος ἐν βήσσης πιλνᾷ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ
ἐμπίπτων, καὶ πᾶσα βοᾷ τότε νήριτος ὕλη·
θῆρες δὲ φρίσσουσ', οὐράς δ' ὑπὸ μέζε' ἔθεντο·
τῶν καὶ λάχνη δέρμα κατάσκιον· ἀλλὰ νυ καὶ τῶν
ψυχρὸς ἐὼν διάησι δασυστέρνων περ ἐόντων·
καὶ τε διὰ ῥινοῦ βοὸς ἔρχεται, οὐδέ μιν ἴσχει,

καὶ τε δι' αἶγα ἄησι τανύτριχα· πῶεα δ' οὐ τι,
οὐνεκ' ἐπηεταναὶ τρίχες αὐτῶν. οὐ διάησι
ἰς ἀνεμου Βορέω· τροχάλον δὲ γέροντα τίθησιν.
καὶ διὰ παρθενικῆς ἀπαλόχροος οὐ διάησιν,
ἢ τε δόμων ἔντοσθε φίλη παρὰ μητέρι μῖναι,
οὐπω ἔργα ἰδυῖα πολυχρύσου· Ἀφροδίτης,
εὖ τε λοεσσαμένη τέρενα χροά καὶ λίπ' ἐλαίῳ
χρῖσαμένη μυχίη καταλέξεται ἔνδοθι οἴκου,
ἥματι χειμερίῳ, ὅτ' ἀνόστεος ὄν πόδα τενδεῖ
ἐν τ' ἀπύρῳ οἴκῳ καὶ ἦθεσι λευγαλέοισιν·

As for the month of Lenaion—bad days, ox-flayers all—take precautions against it, and the frosts which are harsh on earth when the North Wind blows. Coming over horse-rearing Thrace, he blows upon the sea and stirs it up, and earth and woodland roar; many are the tall leafy oaks and thick firs in the mountain glens that he bends down to the rich-pastured earth when he falls upon them. The whole immense forest cries aloud, and animals shiver and put their tails under their genitals, even those whose skin is covered with fur: even through these he blows (διάησι) cold, shaggy-chested as they are. Through an ox's hide he goes (διὰ [...] ἔρχεται); it does not stop him, and he blows through (δι' [...] ἄησι) the hairy goat, but the flocks, because their hair is unfailing, the North Wind's force does not blow through them. He makes an old man bowl along. And the tender-skinned girl he does not blow through, who stays inside the house with her dear mother, not yet acquainted with the affairs of golden Aphrodite. She washes her fine skin well, rubs it with oil, and lies down in the inner part of the house all on a winter's day, when the boneless one gnaws his foot in his fireless house and his miserable haunts. (*Op.* 504–525; tr. West 1988)

εἶπ' ἄγε μοι καὶ τόνδε, φύλον τέκος, ὅς τις ὄδ' ἐστίν·
μεῖων μὲν κεφαλῇ Ἀγαμέμνονος Ἀτρεΐδαο,
εὐρύτερος δ' ὥμοισιν ἰδὲ στέρνοισιν ἰδέσθαι.
τεύχεα μὲν οἱ κεῖται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ,
αὐτὸς δὲ κτῖλος ὥς ἐπιπωλεῖται στίχας ἀνδρῶν.
ἄρνειῳ μιν ἐγὼ γε εἶσκω πηγεσιμάλλῳ,
ὅς τ' ὄτων μέγα πῶν διέρχεται ἀργεννάων.

Tell me of this one also, dear child; what man can he be, shorter in truth by a head than Atreus' son Agamemnon, but broader, it would seem, in the chest and across the shoulders. Now as his armour lies piled on the prospering earth, still he ranges, like some ram, through the marshalled ranks of the fighters. Truly, to

The descriptions of the vault of heaven in the Avestan Yašt 13 and an Euripidean fragment (DK 25,33) preserved in Sextus Empiricus and Aetius show reflexes of a verbal collocation which also left traces in RV, Aeschylus and Seneca. It is based on a formulaic description of the sky as the dark clothes of a nocturnal deity, to which the star-spies were attached. The collocation also recalls the mythical fashioning of the sky, with an Indo-Iranian variant describing it as “mind-fashioned.” I do not intend to delve into details here, but wish to emphasize that the data at hand allow us to reconstruct an exceptionally complex collocation:

*uorunos ... *ues- (*uestro-) *h₂stér *peik- ... (*men-) *tetk-
nocturnal sky(-god) ... clad in clothes star adorned ... mind fashioned

The textual matches between the Avestan and Greek passages are so conspicuous that one is inclined to regard them as independent performances of the same tradition, preferably regarded as an orally transmitted poetic device involving the divine aspects of the nocturnal sky. As long as this hypothesis is accepted, we have an excellent focus

some deep-fleeced ram would I liken him who makes his way through the great mass of the shining sheep-flocks. (*Il.* 3.192–198, tr. Lattimore)

The first three passages display the same contrastive interplay **unmarked verb** (a1), **unmarked verb** (a2), **marked verb** (b) by preserving the marked member (*h₁erǵh-) intact. As a suggestion we are dealing with a hereditary stylistic convention (*pars pro toto?*) occurring within the frame of similar motifs:

KUB XXIX 1 I 29–30: *kattan šešk-* (a1), *kattan šešk-* (a2) ≠ *šarā arkišk-* (b) ≈
RV 4.17.2 *rej-* (a1), *rej-* (a2) ≠ *rghāy°* (b) ≈ *Op.* 514–516: *διάημι* (a1) ≠ *διὰ*
[...]*ἔρχομαι* (b) ≠ *διάημι* (a2)

The hesiodic passage contains further hereditary motifs (cf. Watkins 1975) which all seem related to a set of sexual metaphors. They have been discussed as a whole in Bader 1989 and Jackson 1999b. As for my own contribution to the issue, I would now take some of the additional comparanda (involving the symbolic subtexts of contrasting pairs such as foot ≠ footless, bony ≠ boneless) to be far-fetched. I also regret the ignorance of the ritual and mythical context in discussions of some passages. Nevertheless, the symbolic complex remains a fascinating issue which deserves further analysis.

of comparative mythology, enabling us to survey the realization of the same motif in Vedic, Avestan, Greek and Latin.⁵⁹

A third example involves the Divine Twins or the **diuós suHnú̯*. Another Vedic epithet of this pair, namely *násatyā-*, was formed on a verb meaning “approach, resort to” (*násate*). The verb belongs to the semantic field of safe and happy return (< **nes-*). Νόστος (“Return”) was also the name of a literary genre in Greece, ideally telling the

⁵⁹ The collocation **uorunos ... *ues- (*uestro-) *h₂stér *peik̑- ... (*men-) *tetk̑-* and its different variants will be discussed in two forthcoming studies. The primary *comparanda* are RV 1,25,13; 3,60,2; 10,1,6; Yt 13,2–3; Y 9,26; Yt 10,90; Yt 10,143; ViD 18, ViD 20; Aesch. *Pr.* 24 and *Kritias* (Euripides) DK 25,33. Having added the Gr. compound ποικιλείμων (**peik̑- *ues-*) (epithet of νύξ in Aesch. *Pr.* 24) to the Indo-Iranian parallels detected by Schlerath 1990—Yt 13,3 (*vaste vanhanəm stərpaēsanhəm*) ~ ViD 20 (*vastrəm stərpaēsanhəm*) ~ RV 10,1,6 (*vāstrāni ... pēsānāni vāsāna-*)—particular attention should be brought to the following passages:

I **peik̑- *men- *téks-*

RV 3,60,2:

yābhiḥ śácībhiś camasām āpimśata yáyā dhiyā gām áriṇīta cármaṇaḥ |
yéna hárī mánasā nirátakṣata téna devatvám rbhavaḥ sām ānaśa ||
 (Cf. also IIr. **man- *tačs-*)

II **uorunos *ues- *spokos (→ *h₂stér)*

RV 1,25,13:

bībhṛad drāpīm hiraṇyāyaṃ vāruṇo vasta nirṇījam |
pāri spāśō ní šedire ||

III **h₂ek̑-mon- (→ *uorunos) *ues- *h₂stér *peik̑- *men- *tétk̑-*

Yt 13,2–3:

asmanem ... yim mazdā vaste vanhanəm stəhrpaēsanhəm maīīiu.-tāštəm

IV **h₂stér- (→ *speks̑) *uorunnos *peik̑n- *tékpon-*

Kritias/Euripides, Sisyphos, fr. 25. 33–4

βροντῆς, τό τ' ἄστερωπὸν οὐρανοῦ δέμας,

Χρόνου καλὸν ποικίλμα τέκτονος σοφοῦ

(Cf. also variant in *Doxographia graeci*, Aetii plac. I 6.7: ὅθεν Εὐριπίδης φησί·

τό τ' ἄστερωπὸν οὐρανοῦ σέλας

Χρόνου καλὸν ποικίλμα τέκτονος σοφοῦ).

For closely related issues, see Janda 2000 and Katz 2000.

story of an Achaean hero returning from Troy to his native country. Needless to say, the most famous Νόστος is Homer's *Odyssey*, but fragments of the so-called *Epic Cycle* indicate that a large body of similar stories were already circulating in Greece at the time of Homer. The tradition evidently survived in the early lyric, e.g. in Stesichoros, who is known to have composed a work called Νόστοι.⁶⁰ Such stories certainly had religious or mythological connotations, some of which may no longer be perceptible to us, but they principally emerged from an oral tradition lacking the cultic associations of the Vedic hymns. Nevertheless, the comparison of motifs and formulas in these texts makes a strong case for the presence of an Indo-European nucleus in the composition of the Homeric Νόστος. The following Vedic stanza concerns the mortal Bhujyu who, according to a number of verses in the RV,⁶¹ was abandoned by his father in the midst of the ocean and subsequently brought back home by the Násatyā.⁶² Note that the Vedic adverb *ásta-* (< **h̥sto-*⁶³) is closely related to Greek νόστος (**nóstos*) both as regards its formation and semantics:

*anārambhaṇé tād avīrayethām anāsthāné agrabhaṇé samudré | yád aśvinā
ūhāthur bhujyūm ástaṃ śatāritrāṃ nāvam ātasthivāmsam ||*

In the intangible ocean without basis or anything which can be grasped, you have shown heroism, Aśvinā, when you carried Bhujyu *home* (*ástaṃ*), (he) having embarked on (your) hundred-oared ship (RV 1,116,5).^{64,65}

⁶⁰ Pausanias X 26.1. The poem is unfortunately lost save for some 30 fragmented lines (P.Oxy. 2360 cols. i–ii.).

⁶¹ Apart from the current passage, 1,112,6.20; 117,14.15; 118,6; 119,4.8; 153,3; 180,5; 182,5–7; 6,62,6; 7,68,7; 8,3,23; 5,22; 10,39,4; 40,7; 65,12; 143,5.

⁶² In his interesting book *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic*, Douglas Frame (1978) suggests that the Greek νόστοι have the same mythical origin as this Vedic theme (see esp. p. 136–137), but I am not entirely convinced that one has to see in it the reflexes of a solar myth. For further discussion, see Jackson 1999: 92–95.

⁶³ Cf. Mayrhofer 1992–96, s.v. *ásta-*.

⁶⁴ For controversial matters of translation, see Pirart 1995:165f.

⁶⁵ In addition to the quotation regarding Bhujyu given above, cf. also the following simile found in a hymn to Indra (RV 8,3,23c):

In like manner, the Greek Dioskouroi are said to rescue gods and mortals on land and sea (*h.Hom.* 33,6), including their own sister Helen, whom they brought back home. In what seems to be a virtual bridge between myth and epic, they (“saviours [...] riding over the sea”) “led (her) back to the native country” (πέμφομεν πάτρην) (Eurip. *Hel.* 1644ff.). The expression *πεμπ̄ ἐς πατρίδα was already formulaic in Homer (φίλῃν ἐς πατρίδ’ ἔπεμψαν *Od.* 4.586, cf. 23.221; πέμψουσι φίλῃν ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν 14.333, 19.290), but all the more striking from the point of view of comparative philology are the characteristics of the vehicles (a ship, a wagon, winged horses) described in the verses dealing with the return of the shipwrecked Bhujyu and the Phaeacian ships bringing Odysseus home. Both vehicles are “swift as thought” (τῶν νέες ὥκεῖαι ὡς εἰ πτερόν ἢ ἐ νόημα “their ships swift as wing or thought” *Od.* 7.36; *ráthena mánojavasā* “with a wagon swift as thought” RV 1,117,15cd), an expression which, although being far from unique in the RV, is attested only once in Homer. Furthermore, the Phaeacians and the Nāsatyas (in a stanza [3] adjacent to RV 1,116,5 [see above]) are both said to have “animated ships”: τιτυσκομέναι φρεσὶ νῆες “ships using their minds to find their goal” *Od.* 8.556; *naubhír ātmanvātībhīr* “with animated ships” RV 1,116,3c, or *plavām ātmanvāntam* “animated boat” 1,182,5ab. Not only does the latter characterization exhibit signs of phraseological transparency, manifested in the recurrent element **neh₂us* (as in νᾱῦς and *náuṣ*), but the notion of “animated ships” proves to be as good as unique⁶⁶ in both corpora. We may thus conclude that certain details regarding the Divine Twins survived as a conglomerate in Greek and Vedic literature, realized in the myth of Bhujyu and in one of the most influential stories of Western literature,

... *ástam váyo ná túgryam* ||

... as the bird (or any winged animal) (carried ←) the son of Tugra (Bhujyu)
home [*ástam*]

⁶⁶ I have found some forty instances of *náu-* in the RV, but only one further passage (which also concerns the *Aśvinā*) in which the word is associated with the “mind” or the “soul” (1,46,7ab): *nāvā matīnām* “the ship of (our) minds.”

Homer's *Odyssey*. Where and how the motif lost its association with the Divine Twins, lost its mythic ties and turned into fiction, is open to discussion and partly a matter of definition. The fact still remains that the search for such open-ended *tradita* in the oldest Indo-European literatures cannot be rejected as irrelevant. It sheds new light upon the transformations and imaginary potentials of a shared heritage.

5. *Ritual*

Comparative ritualistics belong to one of the most ignored aspects of Indo-European religious studies, especially if we regard as its main task the careful comparison of words and accompanying acts in ritual texts. The notion that such texts are virtually inexistent except for the extensive ritual manuals of the Vedic *Sūtras* and *Brāhmanas* is contradicted by the fact that the oldest documented Anatolian languages, Hittite and Luvian, mainly survived in texts describing the procedures of feasts and rituals. The Hattic and Hurritic stratum so salient in the mythological texts from Boğazköy need not have been likewise dominant in the ritual texts, at least there are some texts pointing in this direction. Another way of pursuing comparative ritualistics would be to study how ritual acts are alluded to or metaphorically enacted in poetic diction. An example is the mutual reference to the cutting up of a sacrificial victim and the division and distribution of speech.⁶⁷ It indicates a close affinity of words and acts in situations governed by a prescribed order of performance. Furthermore, the metaphorical machinery of Vedic poetry clearly shows that ritual speech and ritual acts were not perceived as distinct categories.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Cf. Svenbro 1984 for the Greek data. Parallels occur in Vedic, where *Vāc* ("speech" or "language") is presented as a sacrificial victim (RV 1,164,5). See also the following note.

⁶⁸ Durante 1968:268ff. The complementarity of poetics and ritualistics is salient in RV. By way of example, the enigmatic noun *vayúna* seems to encode mutual reference to ritual acts and the composition of poetry (2,3,6). In like manner the verb *piṃśati* occurs in the context of cutting up meat (1,161,10; 4,33,4), the composition of poetry (7,18,2) and vocal modulations in ritual speech (7,103,6). More examples of this sort

Discussions of Indo-European rituals have been concerned with such categories as the libation⁶⁹, Indo-European **spend-* or **g^heu-*—the latter root may also have survived in hereditary priestly titles and certainly in the notion of “pouring prayers”⁷⁰ (in Greek and elsewhere)—and the spectacular horse sacrifice. As regards the latter category, striking resemblances between Vedic, Roman and Celtic data testify to the survival of a royal ceremony with apparent sexual undertones. Jaan Puhvel made this assumption all the more plausible by comparing the Gaulish name IIPOMIIDVOS (Epomeduos) with the regular Vedic term for “horse sacrifice,” *aśvamedhá-*.⁷¹ The cosmogonical associations of sacrifice, especially as seen in the Iranian and Germanic traditions surrounding the figure **(H)iemós*, were briefly discussed above.

I will bring attention to the prospects of comparative Hittito-Vedic ritualistics by giving an example of parallelisms in two ritual texts. The comparison involves a RVedic hymn (10,85) forming part of a nuptial ritual described in the Śāṅkhāyana Gr̥hyasūtra (1,12,8) and a Hittite text (CTH 404) recited in a ritual against domestic strife.⁷² Although I have discussed the parallels elsewhere,⁷³ some unfortunate inadequacies have motivated a rehearsal. The priest in the Vedic domestic (*gr̥hya*) ritual is instructed to “tie her (i.e. the bride’s) relations (to her body) a red and blue, woollen or linen cord with three (amulet) gems, with the verse (RV 10,85,28): ‘It is blue and red, the sorcery, the adherence, (which) anoints itself (?) (making) your relatives thrive, the husband is bound with bonds.’” The next stanza of the RVedic hymn reads: “Give away the bridal shirt (?)! Distribute good to the Brahmans! The sorcery, having acquired feet (*padvātī bhūtv*), like

are found in Durante 1968. For a discussion of ritually governed words and acts in Indo-Iranian, see Schlerath 1974.

⁶⁹ Benveniste 1969.

⁷⁰ Kurke 1989.

⁷¹ Puhvel 1955.

⁷² For a comparison of the Hittite passage and Ovid’s *Fasti*, see Bader 1992.

⁷³ Jackson 1999a, 1999b.

the bride it approaches the husband.” Despite the enigmatic character of the two stanzas (probably having something to do with defloration), the details to which I wish to bring attention here are reasonably clear: 1) the ritual concerns a married couple, 2) it involves objects which are attached to a red and a blue woollen or linen cord, 3) the colours of the cords are associated with sorcery (literally a “(malevolent) deed”), 4) the sorcery “acquires feet” (probably to be understood in a metaphorical sense: it “goes away”). Keeping these details in mind, we now turn to the Hittite text. It occurs in the ritual of the wise woman Maštigga from Kizzuwaatna. The ritual was intended to solve a strife between two members of the same household, either father and son, husband and wife, or brother and sister. The non-Hattic origin of the ritual as a whole is suggested by the repeated reference to a male sun-god (*ad-daš* ^DUTU-uš) (e.g. II 19/20), because the chief solar deity of Hattic origin (the sun-goddess from Arinna) was female.⁷⁴ After a number of apotropaic acts, one of which involves a fish referred to as “bull (for breeding) of the sea” (*arunaš* GUD.MAH-aš I 38), “the Old Woman takes a snail (?) and wraps it in blue and red wool, and she brandishes it over the participants in the ritual and speaks as follows: ‘Carry away . . . shovel foot/spade foot (*paddališ padaš*), the evil tongue. Let it carry them away, the evil mouth, the evil tongue (*idalun EME-an*)’” (III 8–13).⁷⁵ What is at stake here very much reminds one of the procedures described in the Vedic ritual. The context is no longer nuptial but still domestic, the concrete ritual artifacts partly remain the same (blue and red wool) as do their association with malevolence, yet not so much evil deeds as evil tongues. The most striking case of formal coincidence, however, is the identical application of marked apotropaic vocabulary: the evil deeds or tongues “acquire feet” (*padvātī bhūtvī* ~ *paddališ padaš*) where they could simply have been ordered to “get

⁷⁴ Cf. the ritual text in KBo 22.22–26, in which the “manliness” of the solar deity is characterized as “new.” As suggested by Haas (1994:378), this may indicate that a god of Indo-European origin was at stake. It is also notable that Kizzuwaatna was not the traditional habitat of the Hattians.

⁷⁵ Translation and discussion in Watkins 1981.

lost!” Was it not for this metaphoric usage, we would only be dealing with a homologous series of ritual acts which could just as well be regarded as accidental or quasi-universal, but this singular detail makes a strong case for the existence of a common Vedic and Anatolian ritual heritage concerning the domestic sphere.

6. *Concluding remarks*

This short study has aimed to describe some traits of common religious heritage among peoples speaking Indo-European languages in pre-Christian and pre-Islamic Eurasia. It has been suggested that the only possible means of detecting such traits should be based on the coincidence of etymological, stylistic and motivic concordances in the texts at hand, not on thematic similarities which are just as likely to occur spontaneously or as the result of diffusion. The outcome of such textual comparisons has not been particularly rich, but may still serve as a promising foundation for further explorations of the change and continuity of orally transmitted religious traditions. Historians of religions using concepts such as “Indo-European religion” or “Indo-European mythology” should therefore be careful not to confuse these concepts with typological similarities in societies where Indo-European languages happened to be spoken. When characterizing something as “Indo-European,” appreciation of the methods and results of contemporary comparative linguistics and philology is required. Without this appreciation the only safe basis for making such a claim disappears. Co-operation between linguists and historians of religions is expected to result in a deeper understanding of the range and limits of Indo-European religions, an issue which has been seriously marked by dilettantism and political bias in recent centuries. If pursued in a less chaotic and wilful manner, Indo-European studies may serve as a useful complement to the study of discrete traditions in Old Europe, the Mediterranean world, the Near East and South Asia.

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Appendix: The Indo-European deities and some of their attributes

GODS

* $\hat{d}i\hat{e}\hat{u}s$
 + * $\hat{d}iu\hat{o}neh_2$
 * $\hat{s}mei-$

* $\hat{u}orunos$
 * $\hat{u}erH-$
 * $\hat{s}edos$
 * $\hat{u}estro-$ * $\hat{h}_2stér$ * $\hat{p}eik'-$
 * \hat{b}^hreg^h-
 * $\hat{u}et-$

* $\hat{p}erk^w\hat{u}h_3nos$
 * $\hat{d}iu\hat{o}s$ $\hat{p}u\hat{l}\hat{o}s$
 + * $\hat{p}l\hat{h}_2\hat{u}ih_2-$ (?)
 * $\hat{s}mei-$
 * \hat{g}^when-
 * \hat{b}^heug^h-
 *(\hat{s}) $\hat{t}enh_2-$

* $\hat{d}iu\hat{o}s$ $\hat{n}epoth_1el$ * $\hat{d}iu\hat{o}s$ $\hat{s}uHn\hat{u}$
 + * $\hat{s}eh_2\hat{u}eliosio$ $\hat{d}^h\hat{u}gh_2t\hat{e}r$
 (* \hat{h}_1) $\hat{e}k\hat{u}os$
 * $\hat{n}es-$
 * $\hat{n}eh_2us-$

* $\hat{s}eh_2\hat{u}elios$
 * $\hat{s}pek\hat{s}-$
 * $\hat{k}^w\hat{e}k^wl\hat{o}s$
 * $\hat{h}_2o\hat{g}mos$ * $\hat{m}e\hat{g}o\hat{h}_2s$
 * $\hat{g}^w\hat{o}us$
 * $\hat{h}_3\hat{m}ei\hat{g}^h-$ * $\hat{u}rH\hat{d}^h\hat{u}os$

GODDESSES

* $\hat{d}i\hat{o}neh_2$
 + * $\hat{d}i\hat{e}\hat{u}s$

$\hat{h}_2\hat{e}us\hat{o}s$
 * $\hat{d}iu\hat{o}s$ $\hat{d}^h\hat{u}gh_2t\hat{e}r$
 * $\hat{s}mei-$
 * $\hat{u}enos$

* $\hat{s}eh_2\hat{u}eliosio$ $\hat{d}^h\hat{u}gh_2t\hat{e}r$
 + * $\hat{d}iu\hat{o}s$ $\hat{n}epoth_1el$ * $\hat{d}iu\hat{o}s$ $\hat{s}uHn\hat{u}$

* $\hat{p}l\hat{h}_2\hat{u}ih_2-$
 + * $\hat{p}erk^w\hat{u}h_3nos$
 * $\hat{m}eH\hat{e}r$
 * $\hat{p}l\hat{h}_1\hat{u}$

DEITIES OUTSIDE THE FAMILY

*(\hat{H}) $\hat{i}em\hat{o}s$
 Ilr. * $\hat{u}i\hat{u}as\hat{u}ant-$
 * $\hat{g}^w\hat{o}us$
 (\hat{s}) $\hat{k}ert-$ / $\hat{s}kab^h-$

* $\hat{h}_3\hat{r}b^h\hat{e}u-$
 + * $\hat{u}ag-ro-$
 * $\hat{t}eik-$

* $\hat{h}_2\hat{e}k^w\hat{o}m$ $\hat{n}ep\hat{o}t$

* $\hat{h}_1o\hat{g}ni-$

* $\hat{p}eh_2us\hat{o}(n)$
 * $\hat{p}ah_2-$ * $\hat{u}iHro-$ * $\hat{p}ek\hat{u}-$ (?)

* $\hat{p}rom\hat{a}th_2\hat{e}u-$

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BOOK REVIEWS

JAMES RANDALL NOBLITT, PAMELA SUE PERSKIN, *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology, and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America*—Westport/Connecticut, London: Praeger Publishers, rev. ed. 2000 (¹1995) (269 p.) ISBN 0-275-96664-X; 0-175-96665-8 (pbk.).

This book, written by two practitioners of clinical and consultative work with present-day victims of ritual violence, touches a thematic which has not yet attracted the attention of many scholars of religious studies. Until shortly ago, phenomena like ritual abuse of women, men and children, animal sacrifice, human sacrifice, and cannibalism were things which happened far away in time and space—but not in our civilized Western culture. We have been forced to learn in the last years that the worst possible non-ritual forms of these crimes, as for instance pornographical abuse of children resulting in murder, can and do happen. However, what seems to be remarkably more difficult to accept is the idea that some people in our direct surroundings do things like those in ritual settings, i.e. as part of their *religious* practice. Acknowledging this as a reality in Western countries—and the reviewer thinks this will sooner or later prove to be unavoidable—means that ritual violence including all the above-mentioned details will no longer remain the domain of police, law and psychiatry, but is going to be one of the future subject-matters of religious studies.

As the authors tell us, the present book is the result of some years of research into clinical, historical and anthropological sources, collecting cases of trauma-inducing rituals, ritual torture and mind control techniques, and especially “including accounts of religions, cults, and fraternal organizations where traumatic rituals were reportedly used for the purpose of creating altered states of consciousness” (p. xiv). The 18 chapters of the book deal with the results of this research, interspersed with cases from Noblitt’s clinical psychological practice; the quick changes between both topics are not always easy to follow. Sources stemming from all continents and major cultures, from Australian Aborigines to Native Americans, have been included in the research the extent of which is documented by many notes and a rich bibliography (pp. 243–263).

Their findings brought the authors to the conclusion, on the one hand, that ritual abuse appears as a worldwide and age-old phenomenon, and, on the other, that the most common psychic affection known today as resulting from the repeated experience of ritual violence, i.e., the so-called Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID, formerly called Multiple Personality Disorder), may be a modern Western form of what anthropologists and scholars of religion call “possession” (see pp. xiv, 45-47 with a list of shared features of both DID and possession). Moreover, the authors found evidence for their assumption that “some variants of possession in other cultures in other times have also resulted from . . . abusive practices” (p. xiv). These are important observations which in any case should be verified more closely in cooperation of psychologists with scholars of religious studies, anthropologists and specialists on the respective cultures and languages.

Not all observations and conclusions drawn by the authors may so far meet with the unanimous approval of the respective specialists. However, not in specialist knowledge, but in the courage to ask new questions and, in search for answers, to transgress borders between scientific disciplines, is the value of this publication based. Hopefully it will have a stimulating effect on future interdisciplinary and unbiased research into ritual violence, Dissociative Identity Disorder as well as the phenomenon of possession.

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KEN DOWDEN, *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*—London: Routledge 2000 (xxi, 367 p.) ISBN 0-415-12034-9 (cloth) £ 11.99.

If the history of European religion is more than the history of the Christianization of Europe and if European unity is not restricted to common Christian and post-Christian ideas, it is of fundamental importance to look at that religion (and its many variants) which everywhere preceded Christianity, i.e. paganism. This is the underlying assumption of D.’s book. Paganism is what Christianity is not, what it did not want to be and whose mere existence it resisted (and in the end successfully so). According to D., Christianity is belief, paganism is (mostly) ritual. Hence, this is a book about ritual and its infrastructure.

Pagan, understood as non-Christian, practices from the Greek and Roman cultures to Celtic, Germanic and Baltic cultures, are presented under fourteen headings. The first half of the book (25-148) deals with special places of worship (but hardly with the topography of ritual). Starting from a division of “focus” (stone, tree, altar) and “area” or context (mountains, islands, groves) and ending with “technology: statues, shrines and temples” (ch. 7), D. collects a wealth of material from two millennia. Pride of place is given to literary sources, but not infrequently archaeological findings are referred to (though never quoted at length).

Ch. 8 shows the Christian appreciation of paganism and the main foci of criticism. This opens a series of chapters on rituals and ritual-related data (sacrifice, calendar, religious specialists, rites of passage; 167-273). A short chapter on the pagan plurality of gods and special functional features (groups, lightning) is inserted (213-223). The last chapter—“Unity is the Thing”—offers below this nice play of words the rather discomforting thesis that pre-Christian European cultural unity is given by large assemblies (*thing*) in groves, assemblies preceded by human sacrifice (274-290).

Only the benevolent reader will wait to this point to utter a suspicion: The existence of an aim does not replace the lack of method. The presentation of the wealth of evidence (291) does not excuse the lack of analytical tools. The abstinence from theory (169) results in the unreflected use of outdated theory (169-171)—devastating if combined with the lavish and (nearly always) uncritical use of 19th-century illustrations. Thus, a heavily rationalizing approach to ancient practices is combined with an attempt at constructing lines of common-sense evolution from stone to statue and grove to the Greek temple. Words and etymologies bridge chronological and geographical gaps (234, 249ff.). Thus, D. does not hesitate to permanently locate his phenomena in space and time (a merit of the book), but intermediate remarks on culture specific practices soon are drowned in the (intended) image of an “European paganism” that is unified by its difference from Christianity only. One need not be a functionalist to miss remarks on the political or (even more obvious, see e.g. pp. 90, 111-3) economic correlates, consequences or preconditions of many ritual practices (or the related Christian criticism).

D. does offer a lot of interesting sources, of examples, of cases, of incidents. He has not succeeded in making a convincing case for “European paganism”: The unity of the polemical concept (embracing primarily Eastern mediterranean polytheistic concepts and practices) does not help the diversi-

ties of Greek and Roman (Italian, Western!) paganisms nor does the etymology of *paganus* establish the town-countryside difference as the one thriving force of the European history of religion. He has succeeded in presenting the “realities of cult”—but only if you accept the 19th-century concept of *realia* as such. *Realities* are a matter of perspectives, and one’s specific analytical perspectives should be declared.

Comparative Religion (European Polytheisms)

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JEAN-LUC ACHARD, *L'essence perlée du secret. Recherches philologiques et historiques sur l'origine de la Grande Perfection dans la tradition rNying ma pa*—Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers 1999 (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, section des sciences religieuses, 107). (333 p.) ISBN 2-503-50964-9 (pbk.) Euro 53.00.

The “Great Perfection” (tib. *rDzogs chen*) is a meditative tradition of Buddhism which has developed in Tibet from the 8th century onwards. It is practiced by adherents of the so-called rNying ma pa school, a minority among Tibetan Buddhists, on the one hand, and the Bon po, adherents of the allegedly pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, on the other. Until recently, historical research into *rDzogs chen* was very much dominated by the legendary accounts of its origin and early development, and only a few scholars, among them Samten Karmay, Kennard Lipman, Dan Martin, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, and last but not least the author under review, have taken the trouble to investigate the sources according to the rules of modern historical science.

The present book, already the sixth monograph on *rDzogs chen* published by Achard, combines in a very successful way a history of *rDzogs chen* ideas and literature with the treatment of one exemplary source text. After an introduction on questions of terminology and sources (pp. 9-23), the author starts in a first part (pp. 25-76) with a historical and doxographical survey into the *rDzogs chen* tradition. In subdivision A, Achard discusses the three main parts of *rDzogs chen*, i.e., *Sems sde*, *Klong sde*, and *Man ngag sde* each with their history and main contents. Subdivision B contains a discussion of different doxographies of the highest of them, the *Man ngag sde*, within

the rNying ma pa system of teachings. Subdivision C discusses the relations to other traditions of Buddhism, among them Chinese *Chan* Buddhism (i.e., *Zen* in Japanese). According to some scholars, *Chan* influenced *rDzogs chen* during the time of the Sino-Tibetan cultural contacts in the 8th and 9th centuries. However, Achard rightly states that there is more evidence against than in favour of this influence (pp. 62-64).

The second part of the book introduces into the history and structure of the *gSañ ba snying thig* ("Secret heart drop" or, as the author translates it, "Essence perlée du secret") which is considered as the foremost of all *rDzogs chen* teachings today, having developed out of the *Man ngag sde*. With its long quotations from the *Lo rgyud chen mo*, a hitherto untranslated Tibetan history of *rDzogs chen*, this chapter is especially interesting.

The core of the book is formed by the annotated translation of the *gSañ ba snying thig* text called *Man ngag dum dum 'khrigs pa dum bu bdun bcu rtsa bzhi pa* ("The Seventyfour Fragments of the Compilation of Precepts") preceded by a long introduction into its contents (pp. 101-156).

The fourth and last part (pp. 215-253) introduces an exciting new perspective on the old question whether the Bon po *rDzogs chen* was taken from the rNying ma pa *rDzogs chen* or vice versa. For Achard found evidence for an influence of the non-dualist *Trika* philosophy of Shaivism prevalent in Kashmir on *rDzogs chen* thought and terminology. This means that whichever school, be it Bon po or rNying ma pa, that was the first in developing *rDzogs chen* teachings, must have been in creative contact with Shaivite mysticism in or near Kashmir before.

The book is concluded by a glossary to the translation, a transliteration of the Tibetan text, an extensive bibliography of Western studies and Tibetan sources, and indexes of Western and Tibetan terms. As a whole, Achard's book is a fine piece of scholarship offering new insights for specialists and for lay people generally interested in Indo-Tibetan religious history alike.

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Periodicals

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Books

(Listing in this section does not preclude subsequent reviewing)

Caron, Richard, Joscelyn Godwin, Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron (Eds.), *Ésotérisme, gnosés & imaginaire symbolique: Mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre*. *Gnostica 3*—Leuven, Peeters, 2001, 948 p., Euro 70.00, ISBN 90-429-0955-2 (pbk.).

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- Bailey, Edward, *The Secular Faith Controversy. Religion in Three Dimensions*—London and New York, 2001, 113, £ 16.99, ISBN 0-8264-4925-5 (pbk.); £ 50.00, ISBN 0-8264-4924-7 (hb.).
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- Ribichini, Sergio, Maria Rocchi, Paolo Xella (Eds.), *La questione delle influenze vicino-orientali sulla religione greca. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale, Roma, 20-22 maggio 1999*—Roma, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 2001, 440 p., US\$ 80.00, ISBN 88-8080-23-X (hb.).
- Sharma, Arvind, *To the Things Themselves. Essays on the Discourse and Practice of the Phenomenology of Religion*. With a Foreword by Jacques Waardenburg. Series: Religion and Reason, 39—Berlin, New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2001, 311 p., DM 148.00, ISBN 3-11-016956-8 (cloth).
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RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION, 12

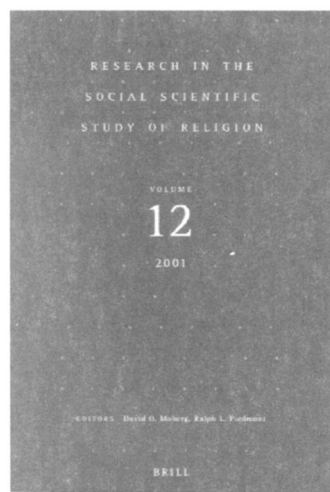
EDITED BY DAVID O. MOBERG AND RALPH L. PIEDMONT

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ticles*.

WON BUDDHISM AS A KOREAN NEW RELIGION

MICHAEL PYE

Summary

Won Buddhism was founded in the early 20th century, but although it is one of the more important new religions in modern Korea little research has been undertaken on it to date by non-members. In this introductory study based on field observations and text studies, essential information is presented which will provide a starting point for further investigations. This includes an outline of the historical development, set in motion by the founder Pak Chung-Bin (1891–1943), and of the general features of Won Buddhism as a religion. Particular attention is given to Won Buddhism's role in modernisation processes, to the question of gender balance, and to the sense in which Won Buddhism should be regarded as a “new religion” on the one hand and as a form of “Buddhism” on the other hand. Of methodological interest is a sub-discussion running through the article about the delicate relationship between believers' and observers' accounts of a religion. Four illustrations are included.

Introduction

Won Buddhism, in Korean Wŏn Pulgyo (or Wonbulgyo¹), is one of the major new religions of modern Korea. It may be said to have originated in the year 1916 when, on 28 April, its founder Pak Chung-Bin (Park Chungbin) experienced an awakening to “the truth.” Pak came to be known to his followers as the Venerable Sot'aesan, and the religion which developed under his leadership was later termed Won Buddhism, meaning Perfect Buddhism. The designation “Buddhism” arises because, while his awakening and message were regarded by himself and his followers as being independently authentic, he retrospectively identified them with those of the historical Buddha, dating

¹ Transliteration from Korean follows the McCune-Reischauer system and variants which may also be found in relevant sources, especially Won Buddhist writings, are added in brackets at the first occurrence. For convenience, the accent is omitted from “Won” when used in the anglicised proper noun Won Buddhism.

from more than two thousand years earlier. This identification will be analysed further below. During the course of the 20th century, with all its political sufferings and changes, Won Buddhism has established itself firmly within Korean society, developing a wide range of interesting features. On general historical grounds alone, therefore, it deserves to receive more attention than it has hitherto enjoyed.

One looks in vain, however, for any general introduction to this religion in English written by an independent observer.² While various non-members have visited Won Buddhist institutions and engaged in discussions with representative persons, none seem to have felt called upon to write even a brief general account of the religion. Admittedly even a brief introduction, if it is to be fair, requires somewhat more knowledge than casual impressions alone can provide. The purpose of the present contribution is to fill this gap by giving a short, reliable, observer's account, which can serve as an orientation for more specialised studies in the future. At the same time a few matters of particular interest for the history of religions are raised, such as the role of Won Buddhism in the modernisation of Korea, the question of gender balance in Won Buddhism, and the appraisal of Won Buddhism as a "new religion" on the one hand and as "Buddhism" on the other hand.

Won Buddhism has not gone completely unnoticed in surveys of Korean religion. Frits Vos, for example, mentions it very briefly in his substantial history *Die Religionen Koreas*.³ James Huntley Grayson,

² Possibly the first general academic account of Won Buddhism in a western language by a non-member, though very short, was my own article in German entitled "Innovation und Modernität im Won-Buddhismus" in S. Keil, J. Jetzkowitz, and M. König (eds.), *Modernisierung und Religion in Südkorea*, Köln: Weltforum Verlag, 1998. The present article builds on the information given there, providing additional material and reflections and a few small corrections. The same volume contains a contribution by Woo Hai-Ran entitled "Die Dialogbewegung aus der Perspektive nicht-westlicher Religionen. Das Beispiel des Won-Buddhismus." On Woo Hai-Ran's recent dissertation and on publications from the believers' point of view, see note 7 below.

³ Stuttgart 1997.

in his wide-ranging and generally excellent work *Korea: A Religious History*, gives it a little more attention, in fact just enough to throw up one or two problems.⁴ His view that Won Buddhism is “clearly an orthodox Buddhist movement”⁵ is not shared here, as will be clear from the more detailed exploration of the relation between Won Buddhism and the general tradition of Buddhism undertaken below. Furthermore, Grayson’s use of the term “syncretism” as, in effect, a synonym for synthesis, is not regarded as appropriate by the present writer. Such usage is quite widespread both in missiological and in anthropological writing, but it is an equation which makes the term “syncretism” itself redundant and obscures the interesting, dynamic features of syncretistic situations.⁶ Finally his discussion of possible influence from Christianity on Won Buddhism is plausible, but this question seems to require more detailed historical study. It seems a little out of balance to have raised it in such a short account, especially when there are, quite obviously, innumerable other sources of influence on Won Buddhism from within East Asian religious culture.

There are probably various reasons for the lack of rounded presentations of Won Buddhism by specialists in the study of religions. One reason is undoubtedly that it has not impacted controversially on western societies as has, for example, the Unification Church, in Korean T’ongil-kyo (Tongil-gyo). Another reason is that, in spite of its notable social significance and influence in Korea, it has not played a controversial political role as have, for example, the Sôka Gakkai or Aum Shinrikyô in Japan, the Cao Dai in Vietnam or more recently the Falungong in China. Not a few specialists in the study of religions understandably feel called upon to provide studies of these religious

⁴ Oxford 1989, see especially pages 250–254.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 254.

⁶ See my articles “Syncretism and ambiguity,” *Numen* 18 (1971) 83–93; “Syncretism versus synthesis,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 6 (1994) 217–229 (on precisely this point); and “Syncretism: Buddhism and Shintô on one island,” in I. Dolezalova, B. Horyna and D. Papousek (eds.), *Religions in Contact: Selected Proceedings of the Special IAHR Conference held in Brno, August 23–26, 1994*, Brno 1996, 159–162.

groups which are constantly referred to in the media for various reasons. This leads to a relative neglect of less controversial groups such as Won Buddhism, even though these are really just as important, if not more so. Such uncontroversial religions may be of interest for a wide variety of reasons, just a few of which are taken up below. In any case we should not overlook that Won Buddhism simply forms part of the overall field of the study of religions, and is therefore worthy of attention by those who specialise in this field.

Won Buddhism's self-presentation

A rather different reason for neglect of the subject may be, ironically, that Won Buddhism itself has a large number of highly educated representatives who are perfectly capable of presenting their own religion to the wider world. In this regard a particularly important role is played by Wonkwang University (Wonkwang Taehak), an impressive institution of higher learning situated at the religion's headquarters in Iksan City. A quantity of the resultant literature in Korean has recently been analysed in considerable detail by Woo Hai-Ran, a non-member, in a doctoral dissertation.⁷

The publications promoted by Won Buddhist organisations, and published by its own publishing house, are of course indispensable sources for informing any first acquaintance with the religion. Of fundamental significance here is *The Scripture of Won Buddhism* (Won

⁷ This dissertation, entitled *Kritische Untersuchungen von Erklärungsmodellen zu Neuen Religionen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Won-Buddhismus*, was submitted successfully at the University of Marburg in February 2001. It is probably the first dissertation dealing with Won Buddhism by someone who is not a member. A significant proportion of the thesis is devoted to more general questions in the study of new religions. One extensive chapter is specifically related to Won Buddhism, its main purpose being to analyse Won Buddhist attitudes towards previously existing religious traditions in Korea and to other movements in modern Korean society. These particular themes are documented, and analysed, with extensive bibliographical references to works in Korean by members of the religion, which will surely be of value to future researchers. Other dissertations located by a general bibliographical search seem to derive from members.

Pulkyo Kyojun) (1988), which had appeared in an older English version as *The Canonical Textbook of Won Buddhism (Won Pulkyo Kyojun)* (1971).⁸ The designation of this book as a “scripture,” presumably by analogy with the “Christian” scriptures, is quite appropriate, partly because of the fact that its contents are presumed to be normative. This is why such care was taken to provide not only the first translation, but later also a revised version. It is also appropriate because of the physical appearance, for the work is presented as “scriptures” are widely imagined to appear. It has a formal, dark cover, nicely rounded corners, gilded edges to the pages and an integral cloth bookmark. The scripture contains an overview of the doctrine, instructions for the daily practice of the religion, and “The Discourses of the Great Master,” i.e. the founder Pak Chung-Bin, known to believers as the Venerable Sot’aesan. These discourses or sayings are set out, in many cases, in the context of brief narratives or dialogues indicating the occasion on which they were delivered.

It might be argued that there is hardly a better general introduction to Won Buddhism, from the insider’s perspective, than the “scripture” itself. Nevertheless it is also interesting to read the less formal articles and chronicles, sometimes illustrated, which can be found in the English language journal entitled *Won Buddhism*, published for a general readership from 1962 onwards. Useful orientation may be found, too, in the booklet by Chung Bong-Kil entitled *An Introduction to Won Buddhism, Wonbulgyo*, of which the copyright is held by the Overseas Missions Bureau of Won Buddhism.⁹ Here are to be found a brief account of the origins of Won Buddhism, the main outlines of its doctrine and practice, and some selected texts.

There are also significant historical materials which can be freely inspected in an exhibition room at the Won Buddhist headquarters at Iksan. This exhibition gives not only hagiographical presentations of

⁸ The 1971 edition was published in Seoul, with 384 pages, by Kyohak-sa Publishing Co. The 1988 edition was published at Iri (now Iksan) by Won Kwang Publishing Co., with 394 pages.

⁹ Iri, now Iksan, 1994, second corrected edition.

the life of the founder but also extremely important documents such as posters and books from the early, foundational period. Such documents illustrate, among other things, the relationship between the innovatory, modernising thrust of the new religion and central themes of Mahayana Buddhism, a point which will receive further attention below.

In view of all this information it may not be immediately clear, especially to believers, what an outside observer can really add. However the information referred to in this section is all presented from within the shared perspective of the believers. The more popular presentations are quite pious and the missionary intention is usually more or less clear. Although there is no unusual problem about the presentations found within the literature of Won Buddhism, there does remain a question as to whether this alone is a satisfactory source of information about Won Buddhism for the wider world. There may be some value, even for believers, in a general account which is known *not* to be the presentation of a believer. On the other hand such an account may also give rise to reflections which may or not be of concern to the members but are appropriate for further enquiry in the general study of religions.

From a methodological point of view it is necessary to be conscious of what I have termed the “tension with believer factor” (TWB factor).¹⁰ In this case there have not so far been any disturbing problems. However small difficulties may arise. How, for example, should the non-member historian of religions refer to the founder of Won Buddhism and his successors in the highest office? One would not normally, in a historical writing, refer to “The Lord Buddha” or “The Blessed Virgin Mary” or “The Holy Father.” Similarly it is doubtful whether titles like “The Venerable Sot’aesan” or “The Great Master” are really appropriate in scholarly writing when referring to the founder Pak Chung-Bin. In this article the religious titles and names have in fact been used in some places, in order to communicate the appropriate atmosphere. No disrespect is intended in other contexts

¹⁰ Mainly in teaching contexts, by means of a diagram, but also paraphrased elsewhere.

where, for ease of reading, the religious names are used without the full titles, or where a historical name alone is used. This usage may seem to fall short of consistency both from a religious and from a non-religious point of view, thus providing a simple example of the TWB factor. Other examples of this delicate interface will occasionally be found below.

Personal impressions

It is of course important, when attempting to characterise a living religion, to complement these immensely significant documentary materials with direct personal impressions. I would therefore like to note quite explicitly the occasions which lie behind the present account. My first encounter with Won Buddhism occurred during a conference of the International Association for Buddhist Studies in Oxford, England, in 1993. During a lecture by Professor Ryu Byung-Duk of Wonkwang University, all the participants at the conference appeared to be learning something about Won Buddhism for the first time, and I myself had the privilege of serving as interpreter for Professor Ryu (via a common knowledge of Japanese) during a lengthy and enthusiastically received discussion period.¹¹ It was some years later, in 1991 and in 1997, that I had the opportunity of visiting Won Buddhist institutions in Korea. For me, as for most visitors, the starting points then were the Won Buddhist Centre in Seoul, the main religious centre of Won Buddhism in the city of Iri (later renamed as Iksan), and the already mentioned Wonkwang University, in Korean Wonkwang Taehak, the precise meaning of which is “University of Perfect Light.”

1991 saw the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the founder, “Great Master” Sot’aesan, celebrated at Iri. These celebrations were presided over by the then “Prime Master” Taesan (Daesan), whose

¹¹ Professor Ryu has also published articles in Japanese (as well as much in Korean) on topics such as “Wonbukkyô no Kankoku shakai ni oyoboshita eikyô” (The influence of Won Buddhism on Korean society) 1984, and “Kankoku bukkyô shisô no tokuchô” (Special features of Korean Buddhist thought) 1998. Full details of the commemoration volumes in which these appeared, in Japan, are not immediately available.

appearance at an open air rally was welcomed rapturously by thousands of believers. It was during this year that the commemorative hall with its statue of the founder Sot'aesan was inaugurated. Beneath it in the same building is the museum mentioned earlier. At the anniversary celebrations a number of foreign guests took part in a symposium of which the proceedings were published in substantial commemorative volumes by the Editorial Committee for Papers Presented at the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birthday of the Great Master Sot'aesan.¹²

In January 1997 I was permitted to visit the Won Buddhist Kangnam (Gangnam) Temple in Seoul, directed by "Dharma Sister" the Reverend Pak Chung-Soo (Park Chung-Soo), under whose guidance I was also introduced to other centres of Won Buddhist activity in the capital. During this visit I shared in the daily routine of the Kangnam Temple, including early morning meditation, and observed the course of the Sunday morning service. Reverend Pak and her assistants spared no effort in introducing me to various aspects of their daily work, which has a strong social component. Following this up with a visit to Iksan, I held conversations with leading members of Wonkwang University arranged by the kind efforts of Dr. Ryu Sung-Tae.¹³ With his help I was also granted an interview with the Venerable Chwasan (Jwasan), who had been installed as Prime Master in 1995. Apart from answering my own general questions, he dwelt in some detail on the problems of environmental conservation and world peace, emphasising that all humanity "in the west, as in the east" should work together for the solution of these problems. Both of these visits were made possible by the kind support of Chon Pal-Khn, a "Dharma Sister" who over the long term has played a substantial role in the international presentation of Won Buddhism. She edited the English language magazine *Won Buddhism*, mentioned above, of which the collected issues of thirty years were published in a single volume.¹⁴ She also played a leading role in

¹² Iri, now Iksan, 1991.

¹³ On the significance of his own academic activity see below in note 29.

¹⁴ Research Institute for Overseas Missions, Iksan 1993.

preparing *The Canonical Textbook of Won Buddhism* (*Won Pulkyo Kyojun*) (1971) and the revised edition, *The Scripture of Won Buddhism* (*Won Pulkyo Kyojun*) (1988) of which details were given above.

The historical development of Won Buddhism

From the point of view of Won Buddhists themselves the history of the movement is seen as a more or less continuous, steady development, following “generations” of 36 years. This development is symbolised, in the religious understanding, by the formal religious names of the founder himself and his (so far) three followers in the top-most leadership position, all of which include the element *san* meaning “mountain.” The honorific titles, names and dates of these leaders, starting with the founder himself, are as follows:

Great Master Sot’aesan (Pak Chung-Bin 1891–1943)

Prime Master Chöngsan (Song Kyu 1900–1962, Prime Master 1943–1962)

Prime Master Taesan (Daesan) (Kim Tae-Gö 1910–1998, Prime Master 1962–1995)

Prime Master Chwasan (Jwasan) (Yi Kõn-Huõng 1936–, Prime Master from 1995 onwards).

“Great Master” is the standard Won Buddhist English rendering of *tae chong sa* while “Prime Master” stands for *chong sa*. These impressive titles could be more closely translated as “great religious teacher” and “religious teacher” respectively, whereby “religious” (*chong*), as can be seen from the Chinese character used to write it, means something like “standing in the authoritative tradition.” The related formal name Chusan (Jusan) was conferred on Song To-Sõng (1907–1946), but he did not take up office as Prime Master because of illness which led to his early death.

The historian of religions, who writes as an observer, does not feel obliged to follow the formalistic idea of generations of 36 years when analysing historical developments. Nevertheless it so happens that there is a broad appropriateness in this presentation, even from a non-religious point of view. The reason is that the main leadership

periods bear a striking relationship to three important phases in the political and social history of modern Korea. The main outlines of the development of the religion will therefore be set out in this way, in all brevity, not for religious reasons, but because such a view is historically compelling. The two most recent Prime Masters, Taesan and Chwasan, can be regarded, so far at least, as falling into the same general historical period.

Both formative and normative for Won Buddhism is the religious experience and teaching of the founder Pak Chung-Bin, whose spiritual awakening, as mentioned earlier, is dated to 28th April 1916. Shortly after this, he founded an organisation known as the Buddhist Dharma Research Association, in Korean Pulpŏp Yŏnku Hoe (see further below). The designation Wŏn Pulgyo (Won Buddhism) was not introduced until 1947 and therefore can only be applied to this period retrospectively. As president of the Buddhist Dharma Research Association, of which an extremely interesting historical poster is on display in the museum, he also launched a very practical land reclamation project. Underlying this action was the idea that practical and spiritual life should go hand in hand, an idea which found expression in a saying of the founder which runs: “As material civilization develops, cultivate spiritual civilization accordingly.” This saying has been treated thereafter as a key statement and accordingly is highlighted on page 2 of the *Scripture of Won Buddhism (Won Pulkyo Kyojun)*, directly after the symbolic circle, Il-Wŏn-Sang (Ir-Wŏn-Sang) (see also below). The land reclamation project was completed in August 1919 and following that the Venerable Sot’aesan withdrew with nine disciples to Pongnae (Pongrae, Bongrae) Temple at Pyŏngsan. Here the leading principles of the teaching and the organisation of the religion were drafted and his systematic teaching began. Not surprisingly, the teaching of the founder himself was subject to a later systematisation process, during which important elements were highlighted. Moreover the story of the founder’s own life was integrated into the teaching and into the “canonical” scripture. The maturely developed teaching therefore displays both a systematic and a narrative aspect. Some of

the features of the teaching of Won Buddhism will be referred to at various points in the sections which follow.

This first period in the development of Won Buddhism, during the life of Sot'aesan himself, was the time of Japanese colonial domination and the two world wars, ending with the liberation of Korea from Japanese rule at the end of the second world war, shortly after Sot'aesan's death. Under these conditions it is appropriate to regard Won Buddhism, like the Korean religions Tonghak (Donghak) and Ch'öntokyo (Chondogyo), as a kind of "revitalisation" movement working in favour of an independent Korean culture. As we have seen, the "awakening" of Sot'aesan was regarded as autonomous. From this starting point the complete truth was to be proclaimed from Korea, and not for example from Japan or from the countries of the west. Thus Won Buddhism stands firmly within the trend for Korean self-determination, independent of the western powers, and yet also independent of China and Japan.

After Sot'aesan's death in 1943 the Supreme Council of the Buddhist Dharma Research Association elected the Venerable Chǒngsan as his successor in the main position of leadership, the "Great Master" (*tae chong sa*) now being followed by a "Prime Master" (*chong sa*).¹⁵ It was Chǒngsan who, in 1947, introduced the name Wŏn Pulgyo (Won-Buddhism), thus providing a compact designation which emphasised the central points of the teaching as being "Buddhist" and at the same time "perfect," somehow superseding other forms of Buddhism. Under his leadership the essential writings of Sot'aesan were collected, together with narratives about his life and teaching activity. These were published under the title *Kyochŏn* (or *Kyojun*, cf. the English translations mentioned above). In addition a place of education was founded for the ever growing membership, known as Wonkwang College. This later developed into Wonkwang University, which is one of the most respected institutions of higher education in Korea today.

¹⁵ Unfortunately I have not yet been able to establish just when these terms were introduced.

Although Chŏngsan assumed the role of Prime Master during the world war in 1943, the period of his leadership coincides significantly with the end of the world war, the end of Japanese domination and the construction of an independent Korea. This may be regarded as the second period in the development of Won Buddhism. The task of trying to rise out of the ruins of the second world war was immensely complicated by the terrible proxy war waged over the Korean peninsula and the consequently hesitant growth of modern democracy. Nevertheless substantial progress was made and it can be concluded that the systematic development of Won Buddhism as the organisation which it is today took place against the background of the emergence and stabilisation of an independent modern Korean state.

In 1962 the leadership passed to the Venerable Taesan. The Won Buddhist movement, or organisation, continued to gather strength, and it is from this time onwards that significant international contacts were sought. Dialogue and cooperation with other religions within Korea and elsewhere came to be a respected activity, while caritative, social and cultural programmes within Korea took on ever greater proportions. By 1995 the membership had grown to a million in Korea itself. The number of assembly halls had grown to 454. To these figures must be added 30 temples in various foreign countries.

The third phase in the history of Won Buddhism, the time of the Venerable Taesan and from 1995 of his successor the Venerable Chwasan, set its own accents which in their turn were in accord with the national situation. The continuing division of Korea has been a theme of discussion and concern among Won Buddhists during this period, and various attempts have been made to provide practical assistance to the population of North Korea, notably for example by Dharma Sister Pak Chung-Soo, mentioned above. In spite of the division of the country and in spite of political tensions in South Korea itself during much of the time, there has been relative peace and prosperity as a background against which Korean leaders in all walks of life have sought to take their place on the international scene. The activities of Won Buddhism have therefore reflected the needs, the interests and the possibilities of the country during this period.

General features of Won Buddhism as a religion

The attractiveness of Won Buddhism for its believers seems to lie above all in the simplicity and clarity of its teaching, in its emphasis on personal commitment and personal activity and in its generous, open and well-balanced ethos. Although the teaching in some respects has a mystical quality, value is also placed on rational clarity, on the rejection of “superstition,” and on personal self-discipline, for example in the prohibition of tobacco and alcohol. This mixture seems to have attracted an upwardly mobile, professional population which helped to establish the religion in influential sectors of society. Such members respect religion and education as a key to the right use of scientific and material progress, in accordance with the previously quoted statement.

The rationalising trend does not exclude a certain tendency to develop a personality cult around the founder which is reinforced by the extremely high respect paid to his successors. Thus while the Venerable Sot’aesan has been described as “sage of sages” or as “the great sage of creation and grace,” Prime Master Taesan has been described as “light of the universe.”¹⁶ During the one hundredth anniversary celebrations mentioned above, the kindly and slightly aging figure of Prime Master Taesan was applauded and celebrated like a Catholic pope in modern times. In this way the office of the leader itself becomes a focus of devotion and loyalty, and thus of an authority which transcends and to some extent suspends rationality.

Nevertheless the organisation is a little cautious about this aspect, as may be illustrated from an incident in 1991. During the centenary celebrations a statue of the founder was unveiled in a commemorative hall at Iri (now Iksan) showing him in the meditational position of a Buddha. This statue is housed in a raised, round hall, open invitingly to the front. The walls show depictions of motifs from the life of Sot’aesan. In 1991 the statue was surrounded by a sculpted lotus petal base enclosed by a firm, smooth edging. This naturally encouraged most visitors, without thinking, to place their right hand upon it as

¹⁶ *Photos, Today's Won Buddhism*, Iri, now Iksan, Wonkwang Publishing Co. 1986.

they went around the statue in a clockwise direction. In other words it guided people into performing a kind of circumambulation around the statue of the new Buddha, even though such a custom is by no means the kind of thing which Won Buddhism normally encourages. There is no doubt that the architecture, the free-standing statue itself, and traditionally respectful attitudes conspired to lead to a religious action which is otherwise well known in Buddhist contexts. However it is not typical for Won Buddhism. On the contrary, practices of an individual kind which could lead to “superstition” are frowned upon. It appears that this effect of the statue and its presentation was not really intended. Indeed my impression is that in the meantime the arrangement around the statue has been altered.¹⁷ The presentation is now quite similar to a smaller statue of Sot’aesan, which can be seen in the museum, on the floor below, along with other exhibits relating to his life. In the last analysis therefore these statues are intended to serve as a respectful memorial to the founder of the religion and not as the objects of worship which Buddha statues effectively have become in other forms of Buddhism.

The description given immediately above could hardly derive from a member and care should be taken that we are not deflected by such secondary observations from the main practices of the members. For them, meditation before the symbol Il-Wŏn-Sang is of central importance. This may be carried out privately, but it is also the communal starting point for the daily life of the Dharma Sisters, in so far as they live in small groups. Every morning at five o’clock a seated meditation before the Il-Wŏn-Sang symbol is carried out, preceded and concluded with a short recitation. The complete procedure takes one hour. Of considerable importance, too, are the regular assemblies in the local temples or “teaching halls” (*kyotang*). These have something

¹⁷ From 1991 I have a clear memory of visitors going round the statue, trailing their hands respectfully on a rim. In 1997 I had the impression that any such rim had been removed, but it is possible that this was due simply to the absence of a temporary floral display set up during the time of the celebrations. It would be interesting to compare photographic evidence from 1991 and later years, if available.

of the appearance of a plain Methodist or Presbyterian church. The congregation sit on benches like church pews, while to the front is a raised platform for preaching. Behind the place where the preacher stands is a large version of Il-Wŏn-Sang. The service consists mainly of silent meditation, preaching and hymn singing and is followed by refreshments and social interaction. These assemblies evidently strengthen the community spirit of the participants and encourage them to order their daily lives in accordance with the moral aspects of the teaching of Won Buddhism. Apart from the specific symbol and the references to the special tradition of Won Buddhism, the whole procedure of sermon and songs could almost be mistaken by an outsider for a Protestant Christian service. The contrast with the prostrations of visitors to traditional Buddhist temples, still normal today in the Chogyŏ (Chogyŏ) denomination, is striking. Moreover the otherwise widespread assumption that this-worldly benefits can be ensured by prostrations and by the acquisition of amulets is decidedly rejected in Won Buddhism as "superstition." According to members, the small symbols such as key-rings or mementos hanging in motor cars, which seem to be treated with some affection, are not protective amulets but simply reminders of one's own religious orientation. The same applies to the rosaries made of large light brown, roughly surfaced seeds, also used in and thus perhaps reminiscent of India, which include in this case a tiny glassed portrait of the founder Sot'aesan in a focal position.¹⁸

A major characteristic of the life of the Won Buddhist community is the social commitment of its members, which is seen most clearly in the charitable works of the Dharma Sisters. An exemplary case is the provided by the many-sided activities of Sister Pak Chung-Soo of Kangnam Temple, mentioned previously, who is to be seen regularly in a Catholic leprosy hospital and who helps other helpless people in all kinds of ways, both in Korea and abroad, for example in India. Her energy and leadership in these works is without doubt a great inspiration to younger recruits. Charitable works of this kind are

¹⁸ The seeds are probably of a variety of *Elaeocarpus*.

supported financially by the lay members, not a few of whom are well situated and economically successful.

The educational institutions of Won Buddhism are highly regarded not only by believers but also quite widely in Korean society. In this connection Wonkwang University plays a crucial role, being attended not only by believers but also by many non-members. The basic idea that “religion” should not issue in some kind of superstitious dependence but on the contrary should help to bring out the independent achievements and contributions of free and rational people can be traced back to the influence of the founder. It is symbolised, for example, by the previously mentioned land reclamation programme which has found its way into the highly respected, corporate, narrative memory.

Gender parity in Won Buddhism

At this point it will be appropriate to draw attention to the relatively strong role played by women in Won Buddhism. Since Korean society was strongly influenced by Confucianism for centuries, the traditional relationship between the sexes has usually been one of male predominance. However modernisation processes can involve a shift in the balance between the roles of the sexes and it is therefore interesting to note the extent to which a more equitable gender balance has been achieved in the context of Won Buddhism, which prides itself on its contribution to these processes.

Historically speaking, the first nine disciples of the founder, who together with him made up the round number of ten, were all men. As the necessity for structured organisation became apparent however, a “supreme council” was set up. This institution, established in 1931, consisted of nine men and nine women. Thus, if we leave the founder himself out of account at this point, some kind of equality of the sexes was institutionalised at an early stage in Won Buddhism. There seems little doubt that this move was intended to give a sense of parity between the sexes, and it is evident to the observer that this consciousness continues to prevail among the members of Won Buddhism today in daily life.

This equality is somewhat relativised when we take into account that the “Prime Masters,” who ensure the religious continuity of Won Buddhism since the founder’s time, have so far always been men. At the same time it should be noticed that the title “Prime Master” is an English version of the original term *chong sa* which in itself is gender-neutral.

A second inequality, or at least asymmetry between the sexes comes to the surface in the performance of professional roles in the religion. Male pastors usually wear ordinary clothes like lay persons, and may marry, while women pastors are supposed to belong to the order of Dharma Sisters, do not marry, and wear a simple uniform and hairstyle. There is no doubt that the Dharma Sisters are a major force in the organisation, and they may be more influential corporately than the male pastors. The question of discrimination through the differentiation of these roles could be worked out in either direction! Some Dharma Sisters express the view that they could fulfil their role as pastors even if they were mothers. Older Dharma Sisters take a more conservative line, emphasising that family life might disturb the meditation routine and the social work which arises out of it. It is of course understandable that, as in other religions, those who have spent most of their lives following one set of rules do not wish to see them set aside for the following generation. That would imply a downgrading of the discipline to which they originally submitted themselves. Informal reports suggest that the current Prime Master has excluded any change in these arrangements during his own period of office, which may well last for quite a long time. This guarantees stability. On the other hand he has reportedly said that the matter “should be thought over” during his period of office, so that some kind of change in these arrangements might conceivably be planned for the future.

While these two points might be regarded as problematic, it remains true that both the organisation and the membership of Won Buddhism are characterised by an attitude towards gender equality which is hard to match in the Buddhist world or in Korean society. In general there is no doubt that the success and respect ascribed to Won Buddhism in Korean society is due in no small part to the self-confident and effective

activities of the Dharma Sisters, not least the leading personalities already mentioned. This is recognised by the male members, and the impression is nowhere given that men might for some other reasons be more important.

In what sense is Won Buddhism a “new religion”?

If Won Buddhism is “Buddhism,” why, and in what sense, is it a “new religion”? Consider first the self-understanding of Won Buddhists themselves. The standard statement that the founder’s “awakening” at the age of twenty-five took place “without the help of any teacher” emphasises his independence from any of the Buddhist traditions current in Korea at the time. In the tradition of Sŏn Buddhism by contrast, the equivalent of Chinese Chan or Japanese Zen Buddhism, the usual assumption is that the experience of enlightenment is normally achieved under the preliminary guidance of a teacher, even if, paradoxically, it cannot be directly taught. While “transmitted” enlightenment is retrospectively identified with the experience of the historical Buddha, and guaranteed by the spiritual lineage or genealogy, in this case it was Pak Chung-Bin himself who decided, on reflection, that among the religions of the world the experience and the teaching of the historical Buddha was the most similar to his own. For this reason, believers regard Won Buddhism as “Buddhism,” and indeed as “perfect” (*wŏn*) Buddhism, and at the same time as a “new religion.” This may seem to be a paradox to those who like to distinguish sharply between established religions and new religions, but it is not a paradox for the members of Won Buddhism. Thus from the point of view of the comparative study of religions it provides an interesting, particular type within the overall range of religions. It can also be regarded as a paradigmatic case within a general theory of innovation in religion such as I have attempted to outline elsewhere.¹⁹

¹⁹ Forthcoming under the title “Elements of a general theory of innovation in religion,” a paper most recently presented as a lecture to the Finnish Association for the Study of Religions in Turku, December 2000.

The relation between Won Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism in general is therefore an extremely interesting question. Is Won Buddhism a Mahayana sect (in the best possible sense of that word) which familiarises modern people with the original ideas of Buddhism in a new and convenient way? Or is it a new religion in its own right, drawing important themes from Mahayana Buddhism but making its own contribution which leads in a different direction? In the second case Won Buddhism would fall into the category, speaking in terms of the history of religions, of those new religions in East Asia which in their various ways have contributed to the regeneration and modernisation of their countries. To illustrate, without asserting specific points of comparison, one might adduce a whole string of examples such as Cao-Dai in Vietnam, Tonghak and Ch'öntokyo in Korea, Kurozumikyô, Ômotokyô, Risshô Kôsei-kai and Sôka Gakkai in Japan. These religions display a varying close or distant relationship to the older traditions in their surroundings, Confucianism, Buddhism or Shintô.

The assertion that Won Buddhism is a new religion can easily be documented. The presentational work *Photos, Today's Won Buddhism*, for example, states firmly: "Won Buddhism is a new religion which goes back to the enlightenment of its founder, the Venerable Sot'aesan."²⁰ We have seen that, as far as the self-understanding is concerned, there is no reason to hesitate in referring to Won Buddhism as a new religion. On the other hand there have been many movements and organisations in the past which in their time seemed to be new and creative, and which yet later have been found a place in the complex history of the ever unfolding Buddhist tradition. Who would say today, for example, that Zen Buddhism is not Buddhism? There are reasons for thinking that Won Buddhism may be so regarded retrospectively by others, that is, not only by members but also by observers or historians.

Given this self-understanding on the part Won Buddhists and, as may be presumed with confidence, on the part of the founder himself, it would not really be appropriate to regard Won Buddhism as a reform movement. There is an element of reform to be observed, in so far

²⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 8.

as it stands in a dialectical relationship to the more traditional kinds of Buddhism in Korea in which ritual action plays a more dominant role, in particular the Chokye School, organised under this name from 1941.²¹ Although the founder Pak Chung-Bin did publish a work on the renovation of Korean Buddhism, which is displayed in the museum mentioned above, the reform motivation appears not to have been dominant in the foundational period. The impetus of the founder's own experience was too strong for the movement to present itself merely as the true or loyal form of an original tradition which had been overlaid or lost. Had it done so, it would have to be classified, in the context of a general theory of religious innovation, as a reforming "sect," in the precise, technical sense of that word. On the contrary, in the terms of the same theory, Won Buddhism may fairly be designated as a new religion. Moreover this theoretical assessment coincides with its own self-understanding. The fact that the new religion, Won Buddhism, also identifies itself retrospectively with "Buddhism," leads to other questions about its relation to that more general tradition which will be considered next.

Won-Buddhism and the wider Buddhist tradition

So how does Won Buddhism relate itself to the Buddhist tradition in general, and to what extent are its statements in this connection plausible? The Buddhist tradition is so widely established in so many cultural regions and cultures that the question frequently arises as to whether a particular movement or organisation is Buddhist or not. Sometimes a movement claims to be "Buddhist," but the claim is questioned by others. And in other, rather fewer cases a religion which claims to represent a new revelation may offer little but repackaged Buddhist ideas. Won Buddhism is a special case in that, as we have already seen, it claims to be a "new religion" and "Buddhism" at one and the same time. The question must be addressed therefore as to whether Won Buddhism is "Buddhist" and if so, in what sense.

²¹ For the key points in the modern reorganisation of Korean Buddhism, see Grayson, *op. cit.* Note 4, chapter 13.

In attending to this question the term “orthodox,” as already mentioned in the introductory section, is rather unhelpful. The difficulty is that the assertion of “orthodoxy” implies that a decision can be taken on the basis of a normative standpoint which is known to the person who makes the judgement. But this is the prerogative of those who, for religious reasons, adopt a position within the tradition. The historian of religion has no such ideal standpoint. A rigorous attempt to apply the term “orthodox” to the history of Buddhism in terms of an abstracted, normative ideal would probably leave hardly anything over. Yet this conclusion would shock many Buddhists who themselves claim orthodoxy. Nevertheless it is sometimes necessary, in the general study of religions, to attempt to answer the question as to whether a particular movement may fairly be described as “Buddhist” or not. Sometimes claims are made which may be spurious, as in the case of the Japanese religion Aum Shinrikyô which I recently discussed in some detail.²² Such claims need to be assessed. This is really part of a an older and wider discussion about the question of consistency within historically extended religious traditions.²³ In disputed cases the question of relative authenticity has to be addressed by historians of religion, but this is a question of historical coherence and reasonableness of claims to identity. Quite different is the claim to “orthodoxy” which can only be asserted by a religious authority from its own normative point of view.

Whether and in what sense Won Buddhism is “Buddhist” will now be considered in all brevity on the background of these considerations. Speaking generally, let it first be established that the teaching of Won Buddhism certainly has much in common with the widely current ideas of Mahayana Buddhism. The syllable *wŏn*, corresponding to a single Chinese character, means rounded, complete and perfect. In the teaching of Won Buddhism it refers to the final “truth” or reality of the cosmos, which is complete and integrated and can

²² “Aum Shinrikyô: Can Religious Studies cope?” *Religion* 26 (1966) 261–273.

²³ Systematically introduced in M. Pye and R. Morgan (eds.), *The Cardinal Meaning. Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics: Buddhism and Christianity* (Religion and Reason 6), The Hague: Mouton 1973.

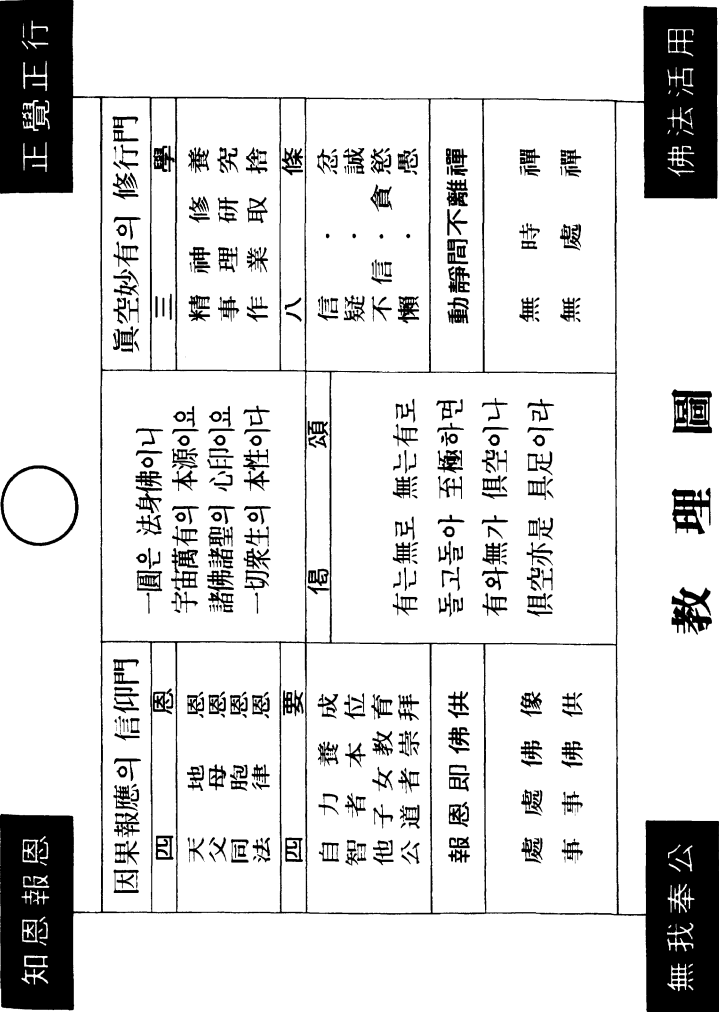


Figure 1. Extract from Prime Master Taesan's A Diagram for the Practice of the Doctrine of Won Buddhism, p. 5 (Korean corresponding to English as in Fig. 2).

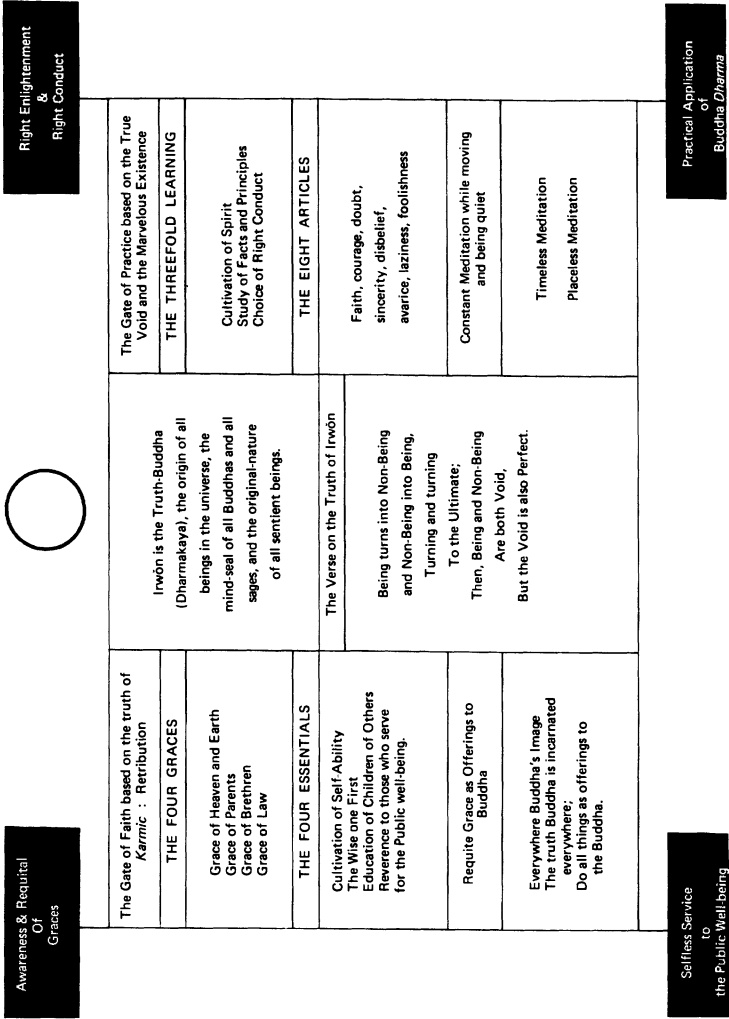


Figure 2. Extract from Prime Master Taesan's A Diagram for the Practice of the Doctrine of Won Buddhism, p. 4 (English corresponding to Korean as in Fig. 1).

therefore be represented by a simple circle. This central symbol of the religion, called Il-Wŏn-Sang, has already been referred to because of its importance in the practice of Won Buddhism. Il-Wŏn-Sang means literally “the form of one circle,” and the Chinese character for “form” used here is the same as that used in Buddhist tradition for the characteristics or qualities of existence. So we may understand that the circle (which, incidentally, is not in itself a Chinese character) allows us to symbolise the ultimate character of existence in the best possible way. In his work *A Diagram for Practice of the Doctrine of Won Buddhism*, issued by Prime Master Taesan, we find that Il-Wŏn-Sang and the Dharmakaya Buddha are shown together.²⁴ That means that Il-Wŏn-Sang is identical with the inexpressible, ultimate Buddha-nature, of which the various individual Buddhas in Mahayana Buddhism are but representations or appearances. Much more could be said in the interpretation of Il-Wŏn-Sang, of course, as we see in the second part of the *Scripture of Won Buddhism (Won Pulkyo Kyojun)*, but that would lead too far afield at this point.

On the other hand it is to be expected that the normative position ascribed to the founder, Venerable Sot’aesan, will not be simply accepted by other Buddhists. After all, he put himself on the same level as the historical Buddha, which must at least appear as something of a challenge for a traditional Buddhist, even taking account of the idea that there has been a sequence of Buddhas through time. The expectation of a future Buddha, Maitreya, is as well known in Korea as elsewhere. In fact one of the most substantial buildings at the temple Kŭmsan-sa, near Iksan, is a hall with a large image of Maitreya, and Sot’aesan spent a month here while thinking over where the headquarters of the new religion should be located. In other words the future Buddha Maitreya was an available concept, and yet the newly enlightened Sot’aesan was not identified with him.

Apart from its clear relationship to Buddhist tradition, Won Buddhism has a decidedly universalist message for the whole of humanity. Not only does it teach that all human beings are equal regardless of

²⁴ Iri, now Iksan, Wonkwang Publishing Co. 1988, p. 1.

race or gender, it also teaches that all religions are in principle one. It is on this basis that Chon Pal-Khn called for the establishment of a “United Religions” in order to spread these values, regarded as spiritual values, throughout the world.²⁵ Although it might be said that these ideas are at least implied by Mahayana Buddhism, they are not really Buddhist teachings as such, in a direct sense. Indeed, Buddhism in its older forms was far from announcing the equality, let alone the unity of all religions. On this background Won Buddhism’s social and cultural call to “unity” among humankind can be seen as a forward thrust which goes beyond the teachings of traditional Buddhism.

Won Buddhism illustrates in its own particular way the close relationship which can exist between religious innovation and reflection about the possible relations between religions in their plurality. It is a normal function of new religions, emerging in a world which is already occupied by various existing religions, to reflect on the way in which these various religions do or could relate to each other. Won Buddhism’s founder Sot’aesan spent the first part of his life thinking deeply about the problems of human existence. He made a positive appraisal of Buddhism, or at least of the historical Buddha, but his thought as transmitted to us in *The Scripture of Won Buddhism* (*Won Pulkyo Kyojun*) is replete with observations on the other religions current in Korea during his time, especially Confucianism and Tonghak (“the eastern teaching”). This feature of his thought provided the starting point for the active interreligious dialogues which have been promoted by the later leadership.²⁶ In other words, we can see in this example a close relationship between the push towards an innovative message, the recognition that religions exist in plurality, and the

²⁵ “Toward organization of United Religions,” *Won Buddhism* 6/6 (1989) 8–12. This idea was also put forward during the centenary celebrations in 1991. Since then, apparently without due acknowledgement, the idea of a “United Religions” has been organisationally developed by a group based in the United States. It seems to me that more credit should be given to Chon Pal Khn in this regard.

²⁶ Cf. the article by Woo Hai-Ran (1998) mentioned in note 2 above.

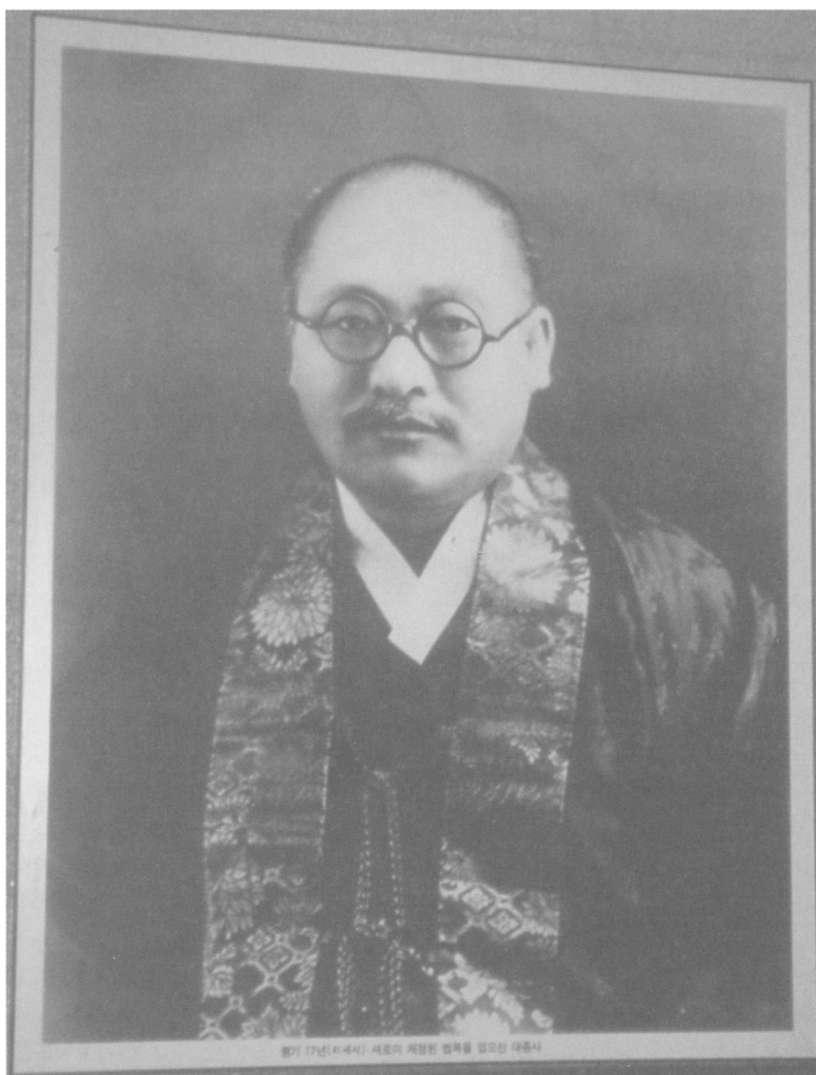


Figure 3. Portrait of Pak Chung-Bin as displayed in the museum at Iksan.

attempt to think deeply over the inner meaning of religions. This combination permits the self-confident announcement of a new solution to what the historian might indeed view as a long perceived problem.



Figure 4. Poster for the “Buddhist Dharma Research Association” as displayed in the museum at Iksan.

The tension between innovation and the appropriation of Buddhist ideas can also quite easily be documented by reference to exhibits in the museum mentioned earlier. Here we see displayed writings by the founder with titles (translated from the Korean) like “The Reform of Korean Buddhism,” “The Correct Canon of Buddhism,” or “Rules of the Buddhist Dharma Research Association.”²⁷ These alone tell us that Sot’aesan thought carefully about the state of Buddhism in Korea at the time. Yet if we look closely at a poster for the “Buddhist Dharma Research Association,” exhibited near a frequently reproduced photograph of Sot’aesan himself, it can be seen that even then quite original elements played an equally important role for him. Without any precise connection being made to Buddhist sources, we see for example that “the essential way of humanity” (*insaeng ŭi yoto*) is presented schematically with various subordinate features.

This view of the relationship between Won Buddhism and Buddhism in general was confirmed for me by the present Prime Master Chwasan.²⁸ According to him, western Christianity arose from the root of Judaism, and Buddhism from the root of Brahmanism. However, Won Buddhism does *not* stand in a similar relationship to Buddhism, he said. Rather, the teaching arose on the basis of the great enlightenment of Sot’aesan. The special character of Won Buddhism, according to Chwasan, lies in the fact that it emphasises not so much the past as the present and the future, and for this reason it is a new and independent religion. However, on account of the great similarity which the founder himself recognised between his own teaching and that of the Buddha, the teaching was later designated as Won Buddhism. Prime Master Chwasan thus reasserts the relationship between

²⁷ This name could alternatively be translated “Society for the Study of the Buddhadharma,” for it was a religiously committed study group rather than an independent research institute, but “Buddhist Dharma Research Association” is literally correct and preferred in Won Buddhist circles.

²⁸ I am grateful to Choi Seong-Hee for translating handwritten notes in Korean made by Dr. Ryu Sung-Tae during the interview with Prime Master Chwasan.

Won Buddhism and Buddhism which is generally current in the tradition.

The question of the relationship between Won Buddhism and Buddhist tradition in general could be investigated further at various points. The commentary on Il-Wŏn-Sang is rather distinctive, for example, while there is also a finely balanced relation between teaching and practice which is obviously influenced by the style of Buddhism. Many nuances in the texts need to be weighed up carefully, taking account of widely current East Asian and more specifically Korean assumptions and allusions. Naturally, these matters are also analysed in detail by Won Buddhist academics writing within the tradition, such as Dr. Ryu Sung-Tae mentioned above.²⁹

In its teaching and its practice alike Won Buddhism displays an active ability both to select and to integrate. On the basis of this creative development it is not inappropriate therefore to categorise Won Buddhism as a “new religion,” even while it explicitly includes the word Buddhism in its name. For the history of religions, the categorisation preferred by the members at any one time may not be the most appropriate. In this case, however, it is difficult to come to any conclusion which is better than that of the members themselves, namely that Won Buddhism is at one and the same time a new religion *and* a form of Buddhism, however paradoxical this may seem to others. This double designation represents a challenge, at once critical and peaceful, to traditional forms of Buddhism, and in particular to those which continue to be current in Korea. In this sense it is a sign of the thoroughly modern character of Won Buddhism.

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²⁹ See for example Sung-Tae Ryu, *Wŏnpulkyo wa tongyangsasang* (“Won Buddhism and Eastern Thought”), Iksan 1995; and *Tongyang ŭi suyangron* (“Theory of Personality Formation in Eastern Thought”), Iksan 1996.

“TO MIX OR NOT TO MIX”:
SYNCRETISM/ANTI-SYNCRETISM IN THE HISTORY
OF THEOSOPHY

SIV ELLEN KRAFT

Summary

Once defined as a “mishmash of religions,” syncretism has been referred to as a meaningless, derogatory and essentialistic term which should be banned from the fields of religio-historical research. Written in defence of the category, this article provides a review of problematic aspects and recent attempts to deal with them. Particularly useful in this concern, anthropologists Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart have suggested a demarcation between “syncretism” (as the politics of religious synthesis) and “anti-syncretism” (as attempts to protect religious boundaries). Taking their tools as a starting point, this article discusses shifting tendencies in the history of Theosophy. The Theosophical Society started out, it is argued, as a hyper-syncretistic religion, while at the same time promoting anti-syncretism on behalf of other religions. More recently, these strategies have been replaced by efforts to protect boundaries and demarcate its Blavatskian roots.

An unsettled category of religio-historical studies, “syncretism” has undergone several transformations historically. It is used today as a derogatory term, as a loose reference to *very mixed* religions and—more rarely—as a theoretical concept. Meanwhile, many scholars seem to avoid the term. Theoretically and descriptively, the religio-cultural mixtures of late modernity are referred to in terms of hybridisation, creolisation or mongrelisation, but rarely as syncretism.

In a handful of studies published during the 1990s, scholars of religion have attempted to turn this trend and recast the concept. Inspired by these efforts, this article provides a review of previous studies and explores, by way of the Theosophical Society (TS) as a case-study, the value of recent contributions. Particularly useful in this context, the TS is syncretistic in any possible meaning of the term. It emerged as a religio-scientific mixture, and established—

under the theological leadership of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky—what might be referred to as a programme for syncretistic innovations. Related to its perennial perspective, this search for unity in diversity is, perhaps, Theosophy's most important contribution to the late modern fields of "alternative" religiosity.¹ An analysis of Theosophical-style syncretism may therefore have broader relevance than the select circle of Theosophical membership.

Syncretism—a Brief History of Application

The term syncretism was first given academic currency by German historian J.G. Droysen in his *Geschichte des Hellenismus* (1836) (Martin 1996:215). It became part of religio-historical and theological discourse during the late nineteenth century and appears, from this period on, to have been employed both as a descriptive and a normative category. Defined in a neutral sense, syncretism came to mean "a blending of religious ideas and practices, by means of which either one set adopts more or less thoroughly the principles of another or both are amalgamated in a more cosmopolitan and less polytheistic shape" (J. Moffatt, quoted in Martin 1996:216). Paralleling this usage, syncretism was taken up by Biblical theologians to denote religious confusion and disorder. As Hermann Usener put it in 1898, syncretism is a "mishmash of religions"—the unprincipled abandonment of the faith of the Fathers (Colpe 1987:219).

So far the most prolific period of theoretical debate, the 1960s and 1970s hosted several conferences, with scholars such as Helmer Ringgren, Josef Kamstra and Ulrich Berner as main contributors. Meanwhile, Robert Baird, in his highly influential study *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (1971), included syncretism among the concepts to be banned from religio-historical research. Processes of blending are, Baird argued, regular aspects of religious

¹ The TS was founded in New York in 1875 by the Russian emigré Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the American Henry Olcott. It is commonly regarded by scholars as the "mother" of New Age and the cornerstone of modern occultism.

history. To describe something as syncretistic is therefore to say nothing at all. As Baird put it: “Historically speaking, to say that Christianity, mystery religions or Hinduism are syncretistic is not to say anything that distinguishes them from anything else” (Baird 1971:146).

Baird’s objections did not silence scholarly discourse. To become a main point of reference, Carsten Colpe’s article in *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (Colpe 1987) drew upon more positive contributions, particularly on the before mentioned conferences during the 1970s. Colpe tried, in this somewhat confusing article, to define and classify syncretistic situations and religions as opposed to stable religions and general processes of change. Syncretism can, first, denote a state *or* a process:

It is used in the first way if, for example, an entire religion—or its particular components or traits—are described as a syncretism or as syncretic. In this case the concept is applied statically to describe a state or condition in which the characteristics of the object are systematically correlated among themselves. (Colpe 1987:219)

In the contrasting sense, sometimes referred to as “syncretisation,” we are dealing with the actual process—a “tendency or development . . . that will end in syncretism” (*ib.* 220). Both aspects should be distinguished from overlapping concepts such as “synthesis” (defined as “a reconciliation of cultures or an integration of cultures into a higher unity”), “evolution” (a “process, internal to a system, that produces new elements and that is irreversible,” the result being a new religion which is not syncretic), and “harmonization” (a process “in which harmony is established among different religions by the claim that they are seeking the same goal”; *ib.* 221). In a finale move for precision, Colpe speaks of “syncretistic religions” as “the high points of syncretic processes” (*ib.* 225). These “meta-syncretisms,” or “second-level syncretisms,” may be distinguished from other forms in that they are “not the first realizations of syncretism, but already presuppose less organized syncretic fields” (*ib.*).

Among the few scholars to have followed the path of definitional clarification,² historian of religion Michael Pye has more recently repeated the need for a neutral (religio-historical) rather than a normative (theological) approach. Like Colpe, he argues, moreover, that in order for the term to be heuristically applicable, definitions are needed. Particularly important in this respect, syncretism should be distinguished from “synthesis,” the former being “the temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern,” the latter representing “the conclusion to a process which is thereby completed” (Pye 1994:220).

Problematic Assumptions and Unsolved Problems

The theories so far presented leave several problems unsolved. Most important perhaps, they appear to be anchored in outdated notions of religious essentialism—of religions as autochthonous phenomena, whose coherence is disrupted by syncretistic disorder.³

Contrasting this notion, what Edward Said (1978) has referred to as “overlapping territories” and “intertwined histories” are commonly accepted in contemporary scholarship. Complexity belongs, in this perspective, to the norm of historical development, rather than to the exceptional phases of syncretistic situations.

Adding to the above problems, scholars have questioned the ability of these theories to explain change. Apart from a view of case-history approaches as indispensable, theories of syncretism offer little in the direction of strategies for research (Rothstein 1996). They tend, moreover, to ignore the role of human agency and strategic selections. As anthropologist F. Niyi Akinnaso has put it:

² Historian of religion André Droogers (1989) deals with similar problems. Having provided a review of previous studies, Droogers suggests that syncretism should be defined as “religious interpenetration, either taken for granted or subject to debate” (21).

³ For a critical view of essentialistic underpinnings in the work of Pye, see Martin 1996.

Syncretism takes as its starting point the clash or interplay between two or more distinct forms of religious symbolism without explaining the dynamics of the interaction, thus excluding the importance of human agency in the creation of religious knowledge. Like the structural-functionalist model within which it was embedded, syncretism recognised change without being able to explain it. (Akinvaso 1995:235)

Employed outside of theoretical debate, syncretism tends to be used as a term for *very* mixed religions. Criteria used to distinguish these hyper-mixtures are, however, never stated, and appear to be based on theological considerations. It is, for instance, difficult to defend the fact that Christianity, whose roots in Judaism and Hellenistic religions would seem to qualify as a hyper-mixture, rarely is referred to as syncretistic. Meanwhile, Hellenistic religions are *always* included, along with so-called New World religions and the new religious movements of Western modernity. The use of syncretism as a derogatory designation seem, in recent studies, to apply primarily to the latter. Whereas the former are sheltered by old age and post-colonial sensitivities, the new religions have neither age nor political tendencies on their side. Mixture across religious boundaries seem, more specifically, to become more acceptable with the distance of time, while the post-colonial consciousness has made negative descriptions of New World religions problematic.

Typical of the above tendency, a recent study by Maria Carlson describes Theosophy as “an artificial, composite doctrine built of the bits and pieces of other faiths” (Carlson 1993:153). Theosophy is, moreover, “a revealing example of the problems of syncretism,” including muddled thought and reductionism. As Carlson puts it:

Blavatsky quarries quotations from a multitude of sources; she misquotes and misinterprets, takes her material out of context, and pairs it with other seemingly similar material. There is no religious thinker, philosopher, or metaphysician, from Abelard to Zeno, whom she does not cite somewhere. The result is a work of epic syncretism, wide open to attacks from clerics, specialists in comparative religion, philosophers, and scientists, as well as representatives of other occult movements. (*Ib.* 56)

One might, Pnina Werbner has noted, ask why “on a culturally hybrid globe, cultural hybridity is still experienced as an empowering, dangerous or transformative force” (Werbner 1997:4). Contrasting the post-modern celebration of mixtures and transgressions, the call for clear-cut boundaries do not appear to have been weakened. Commented upon by Bakhtin in the early twentieth century, it seems, moreover, that the most shocking transgressions are perpetrated by those (like Theosophists) who consciously *pursue* transgressions. Whereas “organic hybridisation” leaves undisturbed the sense of order and continuity, since new words, images or objects are integrated unconsciously, “intentional hybridity” is felt as a threat to the implicit social order—as “heteroglossia” which “rages beyond the boundaries” (Bakhtin 1981:368). The latter belongs, perhaps, to the scenario of “purity and danger,” theorised by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966). “Pure” (real or authentic) religions are those whose content is contained, and undefiled by outside influences. “Dangerous” (artificial or fabricated) religions are those who transgress boundaries, and mix ideas from different sources. Representative of such dangers, Theosophy is not only treated as *bad religion*, but as a *threat* to the authenticity of other religions—to the (“pure”) religions whose ideas it borrows. Rather than treating authenticity as a relative concept, scholars in this way take the “insider’s” position of evaluation and criticism. We are, in other words, back in the landscape of essentialism and theological prejudice.⁴

It is, considering above factors, hardly surprising that many scholars avoid the concept of syncretism. Commenting upon the situation among anthropologists in 1994, Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw note that

⁴ As Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart have argued, “Both putatively pure *and* putatively syncretic traditions can be ‘authentic’ if people claim that these traditions are unique, and uniquely their (historical) possession. It could be argued, in fact, that syncretic blends are more unique because historically unrepeatable” (Stewart and Shaw 1994b:7).

although syncretic processes currently loom large ... there seems to be an uneasiness about the term in postmodern anthropology: we hear far less about culture as syncretic than about culture as collage, as creolized, as fragmented, as interculture, as subversive hybrid invention. (Stewart and Shaw 1994b:2)

Similar avoidance also characterises post-colonial studies, post-modern gender studies and, last but not least, religious studies. Theories of syncretism are usually left out in introductory studies to the history of religion, and theoretical contributions seem to be few and far between. Writing in 1994, Michael Pye notes that syncretism “has attracted a certain amount of theoretical attention in studies of religion” during recent years (Pye 1994:217). However, the examples he gives are mainly from the 1970s, the only exception being a study by Ulrich Berner from 1982.

Recent Theoretical Contributions

In a handful of studies published during the 1990s, an attempt has been made to turn this trend and recast the study of syncretism.⁵ Critical to the search for definitional precision, these scholars approach syncretism as a *field of investigation*. As Charles Stewart argues,

Syncretism poses historical questions about roots, cultural contacts and received influences. These are questions which ordinary people are entirely capable of formulating in their own terms to understand religions as well as other cultural phenomena; anthropological analyses are merely professionalized extensions of this popular mode of thought. At the very least the principles underlying syncretism comprise a mode of describing religion, and at the most they can amount to a theory of religion. (Stewart 1994:128)

Syncretism, according to this view, cannot be defined precisely, since it does not refer to a singular phenomenon. What we need is strategies that help us ascertain how changes take place (Rothstein 1996:14).

This search for strategies is a shared concern of Stewart and Shaw (1994a), and Rothstein (1996). Drawing upon previous research Rothstein suggests, first, that some sort of “structural similarities” may

⁵ See, for instance, Gort *et al.* 1989, Stewart and Shaw 1994a, Aijmer 1995, and Rothstein 1996.

be a precondition for syncretism to take place. By looking into the “common grounds, i.e. the analogies and homologies of or conflicts between the involved systems of understanding,” one may analyse the processes of change in particular religions (Rothstein 1996:14).⁶

A second and, in the case of Theosophy more useful strategy, I believe, is that of a demarcation between syncretism and that which is not syncretistic. Rothstein suggests, as a solution to this problem, the concept “negative syncretism,” namely explicit attempts to avoid influence and defend the faith against outside impulses. Closely related to this concept, Stewart and Shaw speak of “anti-syncretism,” defined as

antagonism to religious synthesis shown by agents concerned with the defence of religious boundaries. Anti-syncretism is frequently bound up with the construction of “authenticity,” which is in turn often linked to notions of “purity.” (Stewart and Shaw 1994b:7)

Rather than treating syncretism as a category—an “ism”—the authors wish to recast the study of syncretism as “the politics of religious synthesis,” and thereby to focus on power and agency.

This dichotomy between syncretism and anti-syncretism has several advantages. Attention is, first, directed towards emic perspectives; to the question of how people more or less consciously relate to their surroundings. Religious actors are not to be approached as passive victims of historical circumstances, but as intentional beings who choose, select and relate to their habitat.

⁶ Discussing the relationship between Transcendental Meditation (TM) and science, Rothstein emphasises the personal element in syncretism and the crucial role of its leading figure Maharishi Mahesh. Innovations are, however, related to a structural or functional likeness between Indian philosophy and Western science: “This phenomenon is well known, for instance in the Afro-American religions of Brazil where Catholic saints are identified with the Orixas of the Yoruba in terms of common functions or appearances. TM has no ancestors and no personal gods to introduce to science, but neither has science anything to equal such entities. Instead TM has a row of metaphysical notions and principles which, in TM’s interpretation, are comparable to scientific models and theories of the universe” (*ib.* 41).

By focusing on emic perspectives one avoids, secondly, the essentialist underpinnings of much previous research. To say that a particular religion is syncretistic does not, in this sense, imply a former history of coherence and purity, nor does it limit this syncretism to a temporary situation. The “authenticity” of particular religions is regarded as a discursive matter involving power, rhetoric and persuasion (*ib.*). Scholars are advised to study these processes, rather than take for granted the purity-claims of select religions.

Finally, the concepts of syncretism and anti-syncretism make it possible to articulate changes and conflicts *within* particular religions—the ways in which both strategies may be present at the same time, and the ways in which shifts from one to the other may take place over time. Theosophy exemplifies, as we shall see in the remaining part of this article, Bakhtin’s “intentional hybridity” as well as the anti-syncretistic concern for boundaries to be protected. Equipped with the above strategies, we shall ask why these paths were chosen, how they related to concepts of authenticity, and whether a search for religious roots brings us closer to the dynamics at play.

Religious Roots and Structural Premises

The TS started out as a hyper-syncretism and remained, during the early period of its existence, consciously syncretistic. Drawing upon the symbolic resources of past and present, theosophists claimed to be recovering an ancient wisdom—the source from which religion, science and philosophy have developed. As Blavatsky put it in the foreword to *The Secret Doctrine*:

These truths are in no sense put forward as a *revelation*; nor does the author claim the position of a revealer of mystic lore, now made public for the first time in the world’s history. For what is contained in this work is to be found scattered throughout thousands of volumes embodying the scriptures of the great Asiatic and early European religions, hidden under glyph and symbol, and hitherto left unnoticed because of this veil. What is now attempted is to gather the oldest tenets together and to make of them one harmonious and unbroken whole. (Blavatsky 1988, 1:vii)

Considerable scholarly effort has been directed towards the sources of Blavatsky's Theosophy.⁷ In most cases intended to document her *abuse* of traditional religions, this pin-pointing of particular sources does not take us far regarding theosophical syncretism. The religious roots of Theosophy are difficult to define, and would not—to the extent that they can be demarcated—seem to qualify as structural premises.⁸ Unlike religions such as Transcendental Meditation, the TS is not rooted in a single tradition, but in several, highly diverse religions, most of which were mediated by scholarly studies. Blavatsky clearly had little in common with the ancient Egyptians, the Gnostics or the famous philosophers and mystics she quotes. Nor is it likely that these traditions placed limitations upon her Theosophy.

Further complicating this situation, the TS started out as an ethnic and cultural mix, whose members were rooted in diverse religio-cultural backgrounds. Stephen Prothero has in a biography of Theosophy's co-founder Henry Olcott traced structural continuities with his liberal Christian background.⁹ Olcott, however, was one of *several* contributors to theosophical theology. His "grammar," according to the creolisation theory employed by Prothero, is therefore but one of *many* grammars, each of them related to the religio-cultural specifics of particular members. Meanwhile, a trustworthy biography on Blavatsky has yet to be written and may never appear. Blavatsky spent "a lifetime ensuring that it would be impossible to separate facts from her fantasy" (Carlson 1993:43). Some 600 studies dedicated to her "unveiling" have not, for this reason one may assume, resulted in a reliable picture of her background and upbringing.

⁷ Blavatsky's most dedicated enemy perhaps, William Emmette Coleman, spent three years looking for evidence of plagiarism in her writings. He claimed, as a result of these investigations, to have found 2000 instances of plagiarism in *Isis Unveiled* alone.

⁸ In Rothstein 1996, as in several of the contributions to Stewart and Shaw 1994a, such a focus has proved useful.

⁹ See Prothero 1996.

Blavatsky was no doubt the main figure behind Theosophy's programme for syncretism, but we do not depend upon the details of her background to explain this choice of direction. Her choice of syncretism may be related to the religious and scholarly debates of the day—debates which inspired a search for unity in diversity, and laid the foundations for a “combinative” religion to emerge.

Factors Promoting Theosophical Syncretism

Men fight about religion on earth; in heaven they shall find that there is only one true religion—the worship of God's spirit. (Max Müller, cited in Blavatsky 1988, 1: xli)

Syncretism as a term belongs to the history of religions, but as a phenomenon of cultural mixing it is probably increased with the advance of globalisation.¹⁰ Born during the “take-off phase” of this process, theosophical syncretism drew upon increasing knowledge of other cultures and religions. Particularly important, advances in the fields of archaeology and linguistics provided translations and commentaries on previously unknown, or little known, religious texts. Theosophy was to a large extent based on such translations and commentaries. It adopted, at the same time, the methods used by scholars of the new-born science of religion. Blavatsky's Theosophy is, as Wouter Hanegraaf has noted, “an example of Comparative Religion on occultist premises” (Hanegraaf 1996: 443).¹¹ Along with a language of universalism and cosmopolitan humanism, this underlying comparativism formed the backbone of syncretistic innovations in Theosophy. Well versed in the scholarly debates of the day, Blavatsky and her Theosophical colleagues made creative use of scholarly advances, thus establishing themselves as a popular and—according to themselves—more profound tradition of religio-scientific research.

The adoption of a comparative perspective implies a relativisation of religious landscapes on the part of science of religion, as well as Theos-

¹⁰ For a study of globalising trends during the nineteenth century, see Tomlinson 1999.

¹¹ See also Kraft 1993, and Steineger 1997.

ophy.¹² This relativisation has frequently been related to religious tolerance, which in turn is described as a premise for syncretism to evolve. Representative of such interpretations, Carstein Colpe claims that,

It can be stated as a principle that syncretism, where verifiable, is a late stage in a particular epoch of the history of religions. It will therefore always contain truth-claims, inasmuch as insight gained at last into the relativity of all that has preceded makes it possible to compare, combine, and interchange elements from the tradition. A tolerant attitude to all that is of value in the world is thus a basic condition for the rise of any syncretism, as well as a basic virtue of the human being who is shaped by syncretism and in turn supports it. (Colpe 1987:226–227)

The above assumptions have been questioned in recent studies. Syncretism does not, critics argue, necessarily imply an attitude of tolerance, nor should it be taken as an expression of respect.¹³ Equally important in the case of Theosophy, emic claims should be distinguished from the level of etic realities. As anthropologist Klaus-Peter Koeping has put it: “We may acknowledge syncretic phenomena as authentic expressions of indigenous identity formation . . . [but] we should be free to point to possible self-delusions to which the promoters of such ideological movements may have fallen pray” (Koeping 1994:174). An example of such movements, Theosophy presented itself as anti-dogmatic and non-sectarian. There is, according to its quasi-official slogan, “no religion higher than truth” and fragments of this truth can be located in all religions (Blavatsky 1988,1:viii). This project of ancient wisdom-recovery was, however, basically intolerant towards contemporary diversity. Extreme universalism means, as Wendy Doniger has pointed out, “that the other is exactly like you” (Doniger 2000:65–66). It meant, in the case of Theosophy, that specific religions were “rescued” from the ignorance of their adherents,

¹² The claim that religions are comparable implies, more specifically, that neither one of them are considered to be unique.

¹³ For a critical discussion of the relationship between tolerance and syncretism, see Van der Veer 1994.

stripped of “degenerated” ideas, thereby to be incorporated into the myth of an ancient wisdom.

Theosophists were not unique in their search for unity in diversity. Commonly regarded as “founder” of the science of religion, Friedrich Max Müller harboured similar visions of a future religion, to be based on the essences of the past. Parallelling Blavatsky’s visions, Müller spoke of the gradual deterioration of “original” religions, of a “true religion of the future” to emerge as “the fulfilment of all the Religions of the past” (Müller, in Sharpe 1986:45), and of comparativism as the method for ancient essences to be deduced. Blavatsky did not, as Müller on several occasions pointed out, have the philological skills required of scholars of religion. Her use of superhuman guides and sources placed her beyond scholarly discourse, and she did not proceed according to academic methods of interpretation. In Blavatsky’s defence, however, nor did always Müller, or later representatives of religio-historical comparativism. “In no literature on comparison that I am familiar with has there been any presentation of rules for the production of comparisons,” writes historian of religion Jonathan Smith; “what few rules have been proposed pertain to their post facto evaluation” (Smith 2000:26).¹⁴ Meanwhile, Müller’s tolerance towards religious diversity was as limited as that of Blavatsky. Informed by Orientalist views of a golden age in India, Müller did not consider contemporary Indians worthy of attention. His India “was not on the surface, but lay many centuries beneath it; and as to paying a globe-trotter’s visit to Calcutta and Bombay I might as well walk through Oxford street and Bond street” (Müller, cited in Steineger 1997:23).

As the founders of a religion and a science respectively, Blavatsky and Müller no doubt differed in crucial ways. Their search for unity in diversity nevertheless drew upon the same impulses—the conflicts between church and science, and the discovery of “ancient truths.” These differentiating processes of the era seem, in turn, to have resulted in a desire for *dedifferentiation*. “Despite the importance of differentiating processes,” Paul Heelas has argued,

¹⁴ Smith’s article was originally printed in his 1982 publication *Imagining Religion*.

there is also no doubting the fact that modernity has witnessed powerful counter-vailing tendencies—now in favour of dedifferentiation. The search has been for the unifying or the unitary; for the same; for the transcendental, in the Kantian sense of the necessary and the universal. (Heelas 1998:2)

The idea of an ancient wisdom was not invented by Theosophists but gained, in the context of emerging globalisation, appeal as a solution to the dilemmas of conflicting truth-claims. We shall in the following section ask how Blavatsky went about in order for her ancient wisdom to be uncovered; how the mixture termed Theosophy came about and how Blavatsky established herself as the leading light of syncretistic endeavours.

A Mythopoetical Approach to Ancient Wisdom Recovery

Commenting upon her first main work, Blavatsky notes that the title “Isis Unveiled” was somewhat misleading, since only parts of the veil had been lifted. The larger share of wisdom must remain covered, since it would be incomprehensible (and potentially dangerous) to the profane mind of the day or, alternatively, because it is unknown even to the Masters of Wisdom. A semi-divine group of beings, the Masters have “kept the old flame burning,” but they are not, Blavatsky emphasised, infallible or all-knowing. Nor should her own writings—produced through their training, inspiration and contribution—be regarded as conclusive revelation.

Precautions aside, Blavatsky and the Masters were nevertheless regarded as more evolved than their contemporaries, and therefore in a position to guide the project of ancient wisdom recovery. Through her main writings, Theosophists were provided with a “few truths”: the basic ingredients of ancient wisdom, as well as methods for its recovery to be fulfilled.¹⁵ We are, in these studies, presented with an

¹⁵ By far superior to the academia of modern times, Blavatsky’s “old science” is in the custody of the Masters, whose careful training has provided her with research-methods unknown by the the scientific establishment. Moreover, Blavatsky claimed access to the so-called “Akasha Records”—a cosmic memory bank which can be tapped into by clairvoyant means, thereby providing her with texts unknown to the

intentional programme for syncretism—intentional in the sense that it was articulated and encouraged. Couched in the language of ancient wisdom recovery, this project was, however, not perceived as a mixing of traditions. Theosophists claimed to be re-assembling that which was once united, thereby to recreate the original tradition.¹⁶ Members could (and did) contribute to this project, as well as evaluate the authenticity of truth-claims presented.

Placed in a favoured position over that of the scholarly establishment, Blavatsky claimed to do science better than the scientists, and religion better than the faithful. A spiritual science or a scientific spirituality, her old science offers “philosophical deduction instead of unverifiable hypothesis, scientific analysis and demonstration instead of indiscriminating faith” (Blavatsky 1982,2:636). The facts presented can, moreover, be checked by serious students, since

The main body of the Doctrines given is found scattered throughout hundreds and thousands of Sanskrit MSS, some already translated—disfigured in their interpretations, as usual—others still awaiting their turn. Every scholar, therefore, has an opportunity of verifying the statements herein made, and of checking most of the quotations. A few new facts (*new* to the profane Orientalist, only) and passages quoted from the Commentaries will be found difficult to trace. Several of the teachings, also, have hitherto been transmitted orally: yet even those are in every instance hinted at in the almost countless volumes of Brahminical, Chinese and Tibetan temple-literature. (Blavatsky 1988,1:xxiii)

There is in principle no limitation to the range of sources relevant for ancient science scholarship, since gifted authors, poets, philosophers and even some scientists may have been inspired by the Masters. In practice, however, Blavatsky applied a scale of more or less reliable sources. She seems, first, to consider antiquity a crucial criteria: the older the text, the more likely that it expresses ancient wisdom.

scientific community. Both *The Secret Doctrine* and Blavatsky’s mystical contribution *The Voice of the Silence* present extracts from these sources, written in the ancient (and to the scholarly community equally unknown) language “senzar.”

¹⁶ Her intention, Blavatsky claims, is to reveal the “original meaning of myths and doctrines,” thereby to reconcile religious diversity, and prove the roots of each “to be identical with that of every other great religion” (Blavatsky 1988,1:xxiii).

Secondly, Indian religions are generally favoured over all other religions, while Judaism and Christianity are counted as the most degenerated, and hence unreliable, of ancient wisdom off-shoots. Generally suspicious regarding the truth claims of the latter, Blavatsky's version of "hermeneutical suspicion" is also related to "advanced religions." Commenting upon the more rare cases of degeneration among these, she notes that

I have not made a study of Hindu law, but I do know something of the principles of Hindu religions, and of those of its glorious founders. I regard the former almost the embodiment of justice and the latter as ideals of spiritual perfectibility. When (therefore) . . . anyone points out to me in the existing canon any text, line or word that violates one's sense of perfect justice, I instinctively know it must be a later perversion of the original Smriti. (cited in Kraft 1999:172)

The principles referred to by Blavatsky are not necessarily those held by contemporary adherents of Hinduism. Her comparativism deems the religio-cultural context irrelevant, since modern day people—even in India—are ignorant of the true content of their religions. Implicit rather than explicit in her writings, the true principles of specific religions are identical to those of the ancient wisdom. The latter may, accordingly, serve as a comparative premise by which to judge and evaluate religious scriptures.

Blavatsky employs a variety of strategies in order for this unveiling to be accomplished. Material which confirms her point is usually incorporated directly. In the case of contradictory material the text or statement is either discarded as too perverted to be made sense of, or some sort of analogical, allegorical or metaphorical interpretation is employed. Focus is in these instances placed on the "inner" (or esoteric) meaning, thereby to disclose the original intentions of the authors in concern (Blavatsky 1988,1:xxiii).¹⁷

¹⁷ As Blavatsky put it in *The Secret Doctrine*: "without the help of symbology (with its seven departments, of which the moderns know nothing) no ancient Scripture can ever be correctly understood. Symbology must be studied from every one of its aspects, for each nation had its own peculiar methods of expression. In short, no

With Blavatsky's example as their "guide" in syncretism, members not only felt free to add their own contributions (or innovations); they were *expected to do so*. In the second of the three official objects of the TS, a call is made for "the comparative study of religion, philosophy and science." Adding to this religious inclusivism,¹⁸ Theosophists were expected to "walk the path alone," accept only what rings true to their Inner Selves, and live by the slogan "there is no religion higher than truth." "True" Theosophists, in other words, are independent, open-minded and critical. "Elders" should be looked upon for advice and guidance, but unquestioned obedience amounts to fundamentalism, and fundamentalism—with its rejection of "scientific attitudes"—means un-Theosophical religiosity.

Ideals do not necessarily translate into practice, but they seem—in the case of early Theosophy—to have restricted regimentation. Equally important perhaps, Blavatsky's somewhat free-floating theology may have *inspired* diversity. Refusing to limit herself to exclusive paths of exploration, Blavatsky developed what might be referred to as a mythopoetical approach¹⁹—a type of "methodological poly-

Egyptian papyrus, no Indian tolla, no Assyrian tile, or Hebrew scroll, should be read and accepted *literally*" (Blavatsky 1988,1:305).

¹⁸ We might, André Droogers has suggested, distinguish between the extremes of a hierarchical and an inclusivist mode of religious construction. In the former, religious specialists monopolise religious production. In the latter much space is left for the laity to participate (Droogers 1995:43).

¹⁹ My understanding of Blavatsky as a mythopoetical thinker draws partly upon Henri Frankfort's use of the concept. Frankfort, in a study of ancient Egyptian religion, speaks of mythopoeic or myth-making thought. The Egyptians admitted, he says, "side by side certain *limited* insights, which were held to be *simultaneously* valid, each in its own proper context, each corresponding to a definite avenue of approach" (Frankfort 1961:4). The mythopoetic, as defined in this article, also resembles the term as used by the so-called Mytho-poetic school in literature: a group of writers who create their own work's structure from an existing body of mythical references or create their own mythical structure in their works. Mytho-poetical works frequently have elements of both existent myth and an altered vision and restatement of that myth in contemporary terms (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1979],7:154).

glossia”²⁰—characterised by inclusiveness, pragmatism and eclectic moves. As composite as the ancient wisdom they referred to, her writings move between the language of science, occultism and mysticism.

Paralleling its rational, if somewhat amateurish scientific discourse, *The Secret Doctrine* is also an occult work—intended to *re-veil* as it *unveils*. It contains, the author teasingly comments, “all you want to know—but you won’t find it” (Blavatsky, cited in Crump n.d.:1).²¹ Blavatsky’s occult messages are “not for mental sluggards” (Blavatsky, cited in Bowen 1988:4). They are intended for those who can think for themselves, discover the lotus in the mud and solve the riddles placed before them.²²

Adding to the voices of science and occultism, Blavatsky also claims the voice of mysticism. Robert Bowen, whose dialogue with Blavatsky has been reprinted in numerous publications on “how to study Theosophy,” tells of his own attempts to grasp her teachings, and his relief when able to live up to her expectations (Bowen 1988:6).²³ *The Secret Doctrine*, as he describes it, is a mystical training course rather than a rational philosophy. It should not be read “page by page as one reads any other book” (*ib.* 2). Nor should one expect from it a “satisfactory picture of the constitution of the Universe” (*ib.* 3). As repeated in several Theosophical commentaries on the study of

²⁰ Bakhtin defines polyglossia as “the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system” (Bakhtin 1981:431).

²¹ “That which must remain unsaid could not,” according to a similar remark, “be contained in a hundred such volumes, nor could it be imparted to the present generation of Sadducees” (Blavatsky 1988,1:xxii).

²² “We could,” *The Secret Doctrine* says, “multiply our proofs *ad infinitum*, but it is useless. The wise will understand our meaning, the *unwise* are not required to” (Blavatsky 1988,2:90).

²³ Robert Bowen took notes during gatherings with Blavatsky and her Theosophical students in London between 1890 and 1891. His notes were discovered forty years later by his son P.G.B. Bowen, who published them as extracts in *Theosophy in Ireland* under the heading “‘The Secret Doctrine’ and its study.” The article is also published in *An Invitation to The Secret Doctrine* (1988), and as a pamphlet entitled *Madame Blavatsky on How to Study Theosophy* (1991).

The Secret Doctrine, students are advised to seek truth, rather than fix their minds on exoteric renderings. Truth lies “beyond any ideas we can formulate or express” (*ib.*). The ideas presented should be taken as “pointers for beginners” and exercises for the development of the mind (*ib.* 4). As a mystic, Blavatsky appeals to the few and chosen, and as a mystic she employs the language of soul-wisdom—the opaque, oblique and analogical redundancy of poetry and mysticism.

There does not seem to be a unified motivation behind Blavatsky’s writings. Works like *The Secret Doctrine* include all the voices referred to above, and these voices become distinct only when analytically separated. It is, more often than not, difficult to differentiate between Blavatsky the interpreter of myths and Blavatsky the myth-maker, between the scientist who reveals, the occultist who re-veils and the mystic who hints. Expressed through each of these voices, her writings complement and contradict each other in terms of content and directives. We have, according to the theoretical language of Bakhtin, a “polyphonic” composition (Børtnes 1993:166). Contrasting the single-voiced discourse of monological compositions, this is constituted by different voices, each of which are subjects of their own discourse and none of which are allowed to dominate or submit. They in this way resemble the playful eclecticism ascribed to post-modern religiosity.²⁴ Blavatsky was not prepared to abandon the search for over-arching narratives, but she may be said to have employed post-modern techniques within a modern frame.

Anti-syncretism on Behalf of Indian Religions

The first thing I did on touching land was to stoop down and kiss the granite step; my instinctive act of pooja! For here we were at last on sacred soil; our past

²⁴ Post-modernism, James Beckford has argued, is characterised by “a willingness to combine symbols from disparate codes or frameworks of meaning, even at the cost of disjunctions and eclecticism” (cited in Heelas 1998:4). It celebrates “spontaneity, fragmentation, superficiality, irony and playfulness,” and it refuses to “regard positivistic, rationalistic, instrumental criteria as the sole or exclusive standard of worthwhile knowledge” (*ib.*).

forgotten, our perilous and disagreeable sea voyage gone out of mind, the agony of long deferred hopes replaced by the thrilling joy of presence in the land of the Rishis, the cradle of religions, the dwelling-place of the Masters, the home of our dusky brothers and sisters, with whom to live and die was all we could desire. (Olcott 1974:13–14)

Following the exodus of Blavatsky and Olcott in 1879, several Western members moved to India, many of them to work actively in political and philanthropical movements. From their positions as white, Western politicians, they promoted the “pure” path of anti-syncretism, as opposed to the damaging mixtures of colonial influence. India’s problems, Theosophists claimed, were rooted in her adoption of Western ideals and customs. As Annie Besant, president of the TS and a leading figure in the Indian nationalist movement put it, “instead of only taking whatever was valuable and incorporating it into her own system,” India was about to “denationalise herself” (Besant 1976:37). There was, however, still hope: “In this very hour of peril, India’s Manu came to save her. . . Just then Theosophy was sent to her, sent to make Hindus realise that they had a treasure, and that it was from the Hindus that the rest had learnt” (*ib.* 37).

Theories of syncretism do not seem to address this type of encounter. These tend, to the extent that power-relations are taken into consideration, to relate to the more clear-cut situations of domination *or* subjugation, or “syncretism from above” versus “syncretism from below.” In the former case we have a context of cultural or political domination, in which those dominated “create meanings for their own use out of contexts of cultural or political domination” (Mayer, cited in Stewart and Shaw 1994a:21).²⁵ In the latter, focus is placed upon “the imposition of religious synthesis upon others by those who claim the capacity to define cultural meanings” (*ib.* 21–22).

²⁵ In line with recent developments within post-colonial theory, attention has, David Chidester argues, “shifted away from the critique of European colonial representations of ‘others’ to a recovery of the subjectivity and agency of the colonized” (Chidester 2000:432).

Although useful, this model would seem to leave out the case of Western Theosophists in India. Working alongside Indians (some of which were members of TS), Western Theosophists create a rather confusing picture of above and below, inside and outside. The TS included members who made India their home, identified with Indian values, adopted native dress codes, and interacted with Indians on the level of friendship and marriage. Typical of this “go native” approach, Annie Besant even claimed “Indianness” on account of former incarnations. As she put it in one of her more emotional portraits:

I know her [India] by my own incarnated past, and by the love of India, that makes me reckon nothing worth having in comparison with her service. I know her, I love her, I worship her, as I know and love and worship no other country on the surface of the earth, and therefore I would fain see her what she can be, what she is in reality. (Besant, cited in Wessinger 1988:213)

Useful to an understanding of the in-between position of Theosophists, scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt and Homi Bhabha suggest that colonial encounters be dealt with through the perspective of “contact zones.”²⁶ Such a focus may, Pratt argues,

foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and “travelees,” not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (Pratt 1992:7)

Constituted by their positions as white, Western politicians in India, Theosophists opposed colonialism, but nevertheless contributed to the imperialist agenda. Their anti-syncretism seems, in this context, to be

²⁶ David Chidester identifies two positions in recent post-colonial studies—indigeneity and hybridity—as relevant to the future of the academic study of religion. Related to the latter position, “contact zone” is defined as “the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha quoted in Chidester 2000:435).

inspired, and at the same time concealed by the perspective of ancient wisdom. Theosophists claimed, as Stephen Prothero has noted, to speak with a neutral voice on behalf of India (Prothero 1996). Contrary to the damaging work of missionaries, they—as harbingers of ancient wisdom—proposed to tell Indians what their religions were really like, how their lives should be lived and what their future should look like.

Two examples may reveal the paradoxical consequences of Theosophy's anti-syncretism. The first example is that of Henry Olcott's "traditionalism" on behalf of Buddhism, an agenda which resulted, among other things, in a *Buddhist Catechism*—written in response to "the shocking ignorance of the Sinhalese about Buddhism" (Olcott 1974:298). Inspired by his Theosophical agenda, which was in turn informed by Orientalist notions of an Indian Golden Age, Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism* was to have a lasting impact. Scholars of Buddhism have, more specifically, tended to define Buddhism as a philosophy rather than a religion (Eckel 2000). Sri Lankan scholar and monk Walpola Rahula, in his popular introductory text *What the Buddha Taught*, tells us, for instance, that

almost all religions are built on faith—rather "blind" faith it would seem. But in Buddhism emphasis is laid on "seeing," knowing, understanding, and not on faith, or belief. (quoted from Eckel 2000:58)

Following the work of Gananath Obeyesekere, historian of religion Malcolm David Eckel has commented upon the irony of these exchanges. Obeyesekere has, first, traced Rahula's interpretation of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, where a series of intellectual and religious struggles took place at the end of the nineteenth century. The catalysts for this movement were

an unlikely pair of Theosophists from America. Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steele Olcott arrived in Sri Lanka in 1880, took the five precepts that incorporated them formally into the Buddhist community, and set about advancing the Buddhist cause. They established a number of crucial organizations, including a Buddhist Theosophical Society, and developed an interpretation of the Buddha's teaching that was designed to turn the tables on the tradition's Western critics. (*ib.* 58)

In his *Buddhist Catechism* Olcott formulated the principles of “pure Buddhism”—Buddhism in its “essential” and “original” form. He insisted, moreover, that the superstitions, charms and devil dancing practised in modern day Sri Lanka were recent adoptions, introduced through influences from outside. Sometimes characterised as “Protestant Buddhism,” Olcott’s anti-syncretised Buddhism has no room for miracles, supernaturalism or gods. It is a rational system which accords with the teachings of modern science. It is also, in what might be described as a “second stage” of syncretistic exchanges, tracable to Olcott’s own liberal Protestant Christian upbringing. His was, Stephen Prothero has argued, a “creole religiosity” which combined Protestant and Buddhist elements in a distinctive way: “While the lexicon of his faith was almost entirely Buddhist, its grammar was largely Protestant” (Prothero 1996:9).²⁷

My second example is that of Theosophical feminists in India. To play prominent roles in organisations such as The Women’s Indian Association, The All-India Women’s Conference and The Daughters of India, Western Theosophists brought to India their experience from British suffragism.²⁸ This placed them in a unique position regarding organisation and campaigns, the writing of journals, the articulation of agenda and rhetorical strategies. However, the aims they articulated were informed by the anti-syncretistic agenda. In contrast to the androgynous future which Western feminists claimed for themselves, Indian women were to realise their “ancient” qualities and “pure” femininity. Particularly important in this concern, educational reforms were regarded as crucial for the slumbering nature of Indian femininity to awaken. The position of women in ancient India was, Besant argued,

²⁷ In linguistics, a creole language is a new linguistic creation that emerges in colonial settings, under the hegemonic authority of a host language (Prothero 1996:7–8). The lexicon (or outer form) of the new language will, in such contexts, typically be derived from the host language, while the grammar and syntax (or inner form) tends to resemble the émigré’s native language. This theoretical terminology has, more recently, been adopted by scholars to refer to changes which takes place in transcultural encounters.

²⁸ See Kraft 1999.

a high one, and it continued to be high until English education divided men and women, introducing a new culture and a new outlook on life which she did not share. Public life was carried on in a language she did not know, and a wall of separation was built up between the home and the outer interests. (Besant 1918:8)

Besant urged the gentlemen of India to take seriously their role in educational changes. She emphasised, at the same time, the importance of rejecting Western curricula. The education of Indian women should be based on national needs and racial characteristics. One should leave the “Hindu woman untouched by Western thought” and take care not to

destroy a type which, just because it is unique, would leave less full by its disappearance the chord of humanity. We have women enough who are brilliantly intellectual and competent; let us leave unmarred the one type which is the incarnation of spiritual beauty. (Besant, in Kraft 1999:179)

The guiding vision of women’s education in India, “spiritual beauty” should be approached through emotional training, with emphasis placed on “soul-education” rather than “mind-information” (Das 1935:461). Girls should be taught “more national religion” (“in order to be proof against aggression from outside”), English (“as otherwise one great part of the husband’s mind would be alien land to the wife”), sanitation, simple medicine and nutrition (to keep the family healthy), and music, embroidery or some form of art (to add to the charm of the home), and the quality of leisure (Besant, cited in Anonymous Report 1905:574–575). To be established as the “official policy” of TS educational reforms, such knowledge would do nothing to injure Indian woman, while it would enlarge her mind, increase her influence and strengthen her character.

A parallel to the ironies of Olcott’s traditionalism, the gender-model advocated by Theosophical feminists was probably closer to the “Victorian angel” than to the women of ancient India.²⁹ Contrary to

²⁹ Named after the ruling monarch in Britain, “Victorianism” refers to the period between 1837 and 1901, in English-speaking parts of the Western world (Howe 1975:508). The Victorian gender ideology saw society structured upon complementarity between male and female, public life and domestic privacy. Man’s “natural” destiny

the New Woman-image that Western women claimed for themselves, Indian women were related to a “Victorian” ideology of separate spheres and complementary qualities. As Besant put it:

In olden days in England women were educated to become wives and mothers. But that is changed now. Women are now educated to become the competitors of men in the race for a living. But such education would be unsuited to India, as it was not desired here to make women compete with men for a livelihood. Such a desire would be against the economic conditions of the country. If you don’t want women to become bread winners, don’t give them an education in imitation of English lines. (Besant, quoted in Anonymous Report 1905:574)

The anti-syncretistic strategies of Theosophical feminists made them popular among Indian nationalists. Theosophical feminists came, Kumari Jayawardena has argued, to be seen by Indian nationalists as their “white goddesses”—foreign women who “found Hinduism or Buddhism liberating, found traditional South Asian society more attractive and acceptable than her own and, most important, sympathized with and supported local nationalist aspirations” (Jayawardena 1995:2). This scenario was, however, a mixed blessing from the perspective of Indian women: “In an era of colonial rule, although they sympathized with the colonized, they also romanticized the past, and harked back to the traditions of the majority community, often ignoring minority groups, thereby promoting dubious and sometimes reactionary agendas” (*ib.* 264).

That traditionalism is not necessarily traditional is a well-known sociological fact. What was unusual in this case was the attempt—in a colonial setting—to impose traditionalism from outside. A century later, in a post-colonial climate critical to the “from above” approaches of missionaries, this betwixt and between position seems to have become more common. An increasing number of self-designated “prim-

as breadwinner, political agent and scientific explorer was related to his superior rationality, while the nurturing capacities of woman made her the “natural” custodian of household privacy. Placed on a pedestal of spiritual virtues, woman was celebrated as the angel in the house and the light-bringer of domesticity. Her sacrificial capacities were considered superior and her potential for suffering and martyrdom unique (Bauer and Rilt 1979:xv).

itives” not only sympathise with representatives of modern day noble-savages, but claim Indian heritage (either by way of reincarnation or ancestors), and adopt what they take to be their culture as their own. Indicative of this trend, the number of Americans identifying themselves as Native Americans grew by 72 percent from 1970 to 1980, and by another 38 percent from 1980 to 1990 (Torgovnic 1997:135). The most dramatic rise occurred in Alabama, whose Indian population rose by 118 percent. People are, Marianna Torgovnick notes of these New American Whites,

ferreting around in attics and questioning relatives, in search of Indian ancestors. Whenever the claim can be made plausibly, they increasingly choose to see themselves as Indians and to identify with Indian values. (*ib.* 136)

In the case of the Theosophical-Indian encounter, as with the primitivism of New Age, this type of sympathetic invasion may be as damaging as the more clear-cut “from-above” approach of missionaries. As historian of religion Armin Geertz has argued in the context of New Age-supporters of Hopi religion, in their celebration of Hopi-beliefs and lifestyles, these misinterpret and idealise Hopi reality, thereby promoting stereotypes which the Hopi themselves are opposing (Geertz 1995:92).

From Syncretism to Anti-syncretism

With modern day Theosophy a novel type of anti-syncretism has been established. No longer limited to the Indian context of religious-cultural revival, anti-syncretism now characterises *the movement as such* and its strategies for survival. There is on one level a search for “orthodoxy”—for teachings and practices consistent with its earliest forms and most important precepts. In the name of orthodox purity the mythopoetical openness of early Theosophy has, moreover, been replaced by a concern for boundaries to be protected, and “foreign” influences to be kept at bay.

The strategies chosen by Norwegian Theosophists exemplify these trends. Never a large Section, Norwegian Theosophy has during the last decades seen a decrease in membership and lodge activity. In

1992 and 1993, a period in which I interviewed most of the active members,³⁰ the Section counted 49 members. Only one lodge was active, and this was organised along the lines of the debating-style society of first generation Theosophy. Unlike their predecessors, however, Theosophists of the 1990s lack a charismatic figure—both on an international and a national level. They do not have similar resources in terms of lecturers, and the Masters have disappeared along with miracles and phenomena.³¹

In parallel with this organisational traditionalism, Norwegian Theosophists stick to “classical” authors and “traditional” topics. They do so, moreover, by way of the more “precise” (or *monological*) teachings of Besant and Leadbeater. Few of my Norwegian informants had read *Isis Unveiled* or *The Secret Doctrine*. Their back-to-Blavatsky approach was, rather, mediated through Besant and Leadbeater as her foremost interpreters. We have here a process of *canonisation*, in the sense that heteroglossia is eliminated and a “single-voiced” reading is facilitated (Bakhtin 1981:425). Whereas Blavatsky’s mythopoetical writings *demand* interpretation and inspire diversity, those of her theological successors offer *information* along the lines of clear-cut answers and straightforward solutions. Thus facilitating a shift in the direction of anti-syncretism, the “few truths” presented by Blavatsky have been rendered precise and uniform.

With these processes in mind, it may be useful to modify the common assumption that “religions of the book” have less potential for syncretism than non-literate religions. According to this theory, written texts in the form of holy scriptures and theological commentaries may “have the effect of stabilizing a tradition or, at the very least, of creating an orthodox standard by which divergent local traditions are evaluated, if not regulated” (Stewart 1995:30). In the case of Theo-

³⁰ For a more detailed study of Norwegian Theosophy, see Kraft 1993. I stayed at the Theosophical headquarters in Adyar (India) and Wheaton in 1995 and 1996 and my impressions from these places point in similar directions.

³¹ What is referred to in Theosophical literature as “phenomena” include the mysterious arrival of letters signed by the Masters of wisdom.

sophy, however, it appears to be the *type* of texts, rather than texts as such which serves to promote or restrict syncretism. Holy texts were present from the start, with the so-called Mahatma-letters (appearing mysteriously in response to questions by leading Theosophist A.P. Sinnett), and the mediated writings of Blavatsky. However, it was only with the theologically more single-voiced commentaries of Besant and Leadbater that orthodox standards for “authentic Theosophy” were established.

There is one important exception to the anti-syncretism of modern Theosophy. The exception is science. Historian of religions Mikael Rothstein (1996) comments on issues pertaining to this. Rothstein argues, more specifically, that TM shares with Theosophy a syncretistic approach to science. While correct with regard to the present day situation, this was not, however, the case with early Theosophy. Blavatsky was rarely as harsh as in her attacks upon science. She seems, in this respect, to be closer to the negative syncretism which Rothstein ascribes to Hare Krishna, than to TM. Basically in line with the former, Blavatsky regards contemporary science as incompetent and claims to do science better than the scientists. What mainly distinguishes her from Hare Krishna, however, is not her *attitude* towards science, but the fact that she nevertheless draws upon the work of the scholars she is attacking.

Why, then, has Theosophy become more syncretistic with regard to science, and anti-syncretistic in other respects? Both questions may, I believe, be related to its current lack of resources, position and confidence. The TS may never have been in a position to confront seriously the scientific community, but in the late nineteenth century it had a name and reputation, and the science it confronted was more unsettled and therefore easier to attack. Contrasting this situation, modern day knowledge of Theosophy is more or less limited to scholars of religion and select circles of historically minded occultists. Theosophy is no longer a privileged counter public, and its main ideas—such as brotherhood, karma and reincarnation—have become a part of the “religious correctness” of its New Age-competitors. In this situation, Theosophists seem to opt for a position as serious,

respectable, and intellectual—to maintain the TS as an alternative to the free-floating spirituality which they ascribe to the New Age-movement.

Religions must change in order to retain meaning in the face of changing social and political circumstances (Rothstein 1996:47), but in the case of Theosophy changes have not contributed to its viability. By abandoning its mythopoetical style Theosophy may, first, have lost its main asset in the context of late modern religiosity. Blavatsky's mythopoetical creativity is carried on by her New Age-successors, but very few of these turn to TS for inspiration. Secondly, the shift to anti-syncretism may have impeded a revision of notions which appear as outdated or problematic, not only to the outside world of potential recruits, but also to members. Particularly important in this respect, the TS has failed to confront racist notions in the teachings of founding members, and the largely anti-sexual perspectives of Victorian Theosophy have not been dealt with.³² Meanwhile, the debating-style concept is not, as was the case in early Theosophy, complemented by ceremonies and rituals.³³ Limited to the discussion of texts and concepts, lodge-meetings offer little in the direction of peak-experience, emotional interaction or *communitas*.

Finally, and most importantly perhaps, the shift to anti-syncretism represents a departure from what appears to be Theosophy's central narrative; the perennial project of ancient wisdom recovery.³⁴ As

³² Several of my Norwegian informants felt uneasy with regard to Theosophy's teachings on "primitive races." The issue of homosexuality has, similarly, remained touchy, and has rarely—after heated debates around the sexual practices of Leadbeater in the early twentieth century—been discussed in written publications.

³³ In the early period of Theosophy, organisations such as Co-Masonry and The Liberal Catholic Church catered for these needs. Although not formally connected to TS, these movements were to a large degree constituted by its members.

³⁴ Critical to "essentialism" in its traditional sense, Malcolm David Eckel asks whether a "new essentialism" is needed. This, he argues, should be an essentialism "based not on a concept of substantive identity but on a pragmatic sense that certain features of a tradition are necessary to the healthy survival of the community" (Eckel 2000:61).

formulated in the three objects of the TS, this project would seem to *demand* the ongoing process of syncretisation. Perhaps relevant in this context, Theosophists commonly distinguish between Theosophy and the TS. The latter, they argue, is valuable to the extent that it promotes the One Life, the Universal Brotherhood and the Ancient Wisdom—that is, in the language employed in this article, only to the extent that its syncretism is effective. If it ceases to be effective, then members might as well take their Theosophical business elsewhere. Herself very clear on this issue, Blavatsky in arguments with Olcott over the direction of the TS, claimed that her loyalty was to the Theosophical *Cause*, and this cause only.

Concluding Remarks

To be a student of religion looking at the late-twentieth-century world is to recognize that religious communities do not exist in isolation, but in interrelation with one another, and must be studied in that dynamic interrelation. (Eck 2000:134)

Do we need the concept of syncretism, or should it—as Baird and others have suggested—be banned from religio-historical research? In defense of the former, three points may be stated. Syncretism, first, is the established term for religious mixtures. It may, secondly, be useful to retain a distinction between syncretism (applied to religion) and creolisation/hybridisation (applied to culture). Religious encounters are cultural encounters, but one religion can belong to several cultures, just as one culture can give room for several religions. Thirdly, a change of vocabulary will not solve the problems referred to in this article. Anthropological theories of hybridisation and creolisation have been confronted with similar charges of essentialism and derogatory connotations.³⁵ Problematic aspects seem, in each of these cases, to be

³⁵ These theories refer, several scholars have argued, back to an original unity (a biological entity in the case of hybridisation, and a language in the case of creolisation), thus ignoring the fact that cultures have been syncretic, hybrid or creole all along. Meanwhile, the hybrid has rarely (post-modern enthusiasts excepted) carried positive connotations, while creolisation is tainted by linguistic prejudices.

rooted in the material which they address, rather than the terms used to address them.

The more recent theories referred to in this article offer solutions to these problems. By approaching syncretism as “the politics of religious synthesis,” attention is directed towards the emic search for authenticity and identity control. Scholars thereby avoid the essentialistic concept of “pure” traditions, and gain tools for a study of how changes take place.

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SUPERSTITIO ET CONIURATIO

ÀGNES A. NAGY

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to draw the attention to one of the reasons which may have contributed to the suspicion against—as well as the local persecutions of—the Christians in the second and third centuries. We want to point to the possibility that the new religious community changes into a *coniuratio* and becomes a danger for the ancient community from which it has come.

Christianity, just as the Bacchanalia, was more than an ordinary *superstitio*. According to Livy, the Bacchanalia showed four characteristics distinguishing them from a *superstitio*: 1) new, strong links within the group instead of the ancient ones which connected the members to their traditional social structure; 2) an oath of initiation to respect the own laws of the new community; 3) animosity against the State; 4) the large numbers of the followers.

Pliny the Younger found three of these characteristics with the Christians of Bithynia. For Pliny, the only difference consisted in the fact that the Bacchanalia obliged the members to break Roman law and thereby became a *coniuratio*, whereas Christians did not commit crimes and for this reason Christianity had not yet changed from a *superstitio praua* to a *coniuratio*. However, the vocabulary of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Celsus, as well as the description of the Christian persecution in Lugdunum and Vienna, show that most Romans did not make this distinction. In their eyes Christianity, this new community so similar to the *coniuratio* of the Bacchanalia, was a real threat to the existence of traditional society and deserved to be punished as such—by extermination.

L'hypothèse de R.M. Grant,¹ selon laquelle Pline le Jeune, alors gouverneur du Pont et de la Bithynie, confronté aux problèmes du

¹ « Pline et les chrétiens », *HThR* 41 (1948) 273–74 ; plus récemment : « Charges of 'Immorality' against Various Religious Groups in Antiquity », in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, éd. R. van den Broek et M.J. Vermaseren (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain, 91), Leiden : Brill 1981, 161–170 ; on retrouve la thèse de Grant renforcée par de nouveaux arguments dans J.M. Pailler, *Bacchanalia. La répression de 186 av. J.-C. à Rome et en Italie : Vestiges, images*,

Christianisme dans ses provinces aurait eu en tête l'affaire des Bacchanales comme on peut la lire chez Tite-Live, n'est pas nouvelle. L'idée que cette affaire a pu servir comme exemple non seulement à Pline, mais aussi aux autorités et au peuple romains dans la construction de l'image du Christianisme dès 64 a été aussi souvent formulée.² Le but du présent article est d'apporter quelques nouveaux éléments à ces deux hypothèses controversées en examinant la question sous un nouvel angle. La plupart des chercheurs sont d'accord pour dire que l'affaire des Bacchanales servait comme modèle à la création de l'image du Christianisme et que les deux ont dû être considérés à l'époque comme des entreprises visant à renverser l'ordre établi du monde romain. La ressemblance des *flagitia* imputés aux deux groupes avec ceux imputés aux conspirateurs (déviances sexuelles, sacrifices humains, engagement par serment) nous conduit à la conclusion que les Bacchanales et le Christianisme ont du être perçus par les Romains comme des *coniurationes*. Sans vouloir mettre en doute l'existence de cette image de *coniuratio* que nous tenons aussi pour certaine, nous aimerions apporter des précisions sur un point : même s'il est vrai que l'opinion publique a certainement considéré les Bacchants et les Chrétiens comme des gens maléfiques, ennemis de l'ordre romain, il faut insister sur le fait qu'aux yeux des Romains ces deux *coniurationes* étaient nées de *superstitiones pravae*. Et bien que cette distinction subtile entre *coniurationes* ordinaires et *coniurationes* d'origine religieuse semble négligeable, dans le cas du Christianisme, ce détail peut expliquer la contradiction entre les nombreux pogroms locaux et la relative tolérance de la politique impériale du 2^e siècle.

tradition (Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 270), Rome : École Française de Rome 1988, 759–770.

² P. ex. : D. Van Berchem, « Le 'De Pallio' de Tertullien et le conflit du christianisme et de l'Empire », *Museum Helveticum* 1 (1944) 100 ; J. Bayet, *Littérature latine*, 6^e éd., Paris : A. Colin 1992, 650–51 ; W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, Oxford : Blackwell 1965, 166 ; Pailler, *op. cit.*, 770–816 ; N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, St. Albans : Paladin 1979, préface et 1–15 ; A. Giovannini, « L'interdit contre les Chrétiens : raison d'état ou mesure de police ? » *Cahiers du Centre G. Glotz* 7 (1996) 103–134.

Nous allons d'abord présenter les quatre éléments qui, à notre avis, ont fait des Bacchanales une affaire d'importance capitale au point de vue de la sécurité de l'État Romain, en transformant son image d'un vénérable culte de Bacchus en celle d'une *superstitio/religio praua* d'abord, ensuite en celle d'une *coniuratio*. On verra aussi pourquoi l'opinion publique a cru reconnaître ces quatre éléments dans le Christianisme. Ensuite, on comprendra comment Pline, qui avait d'abord soupçonné les Chrétiens de Bithynie de *coniuratio* par analogie des Bacchanales, est arrivé à la conclusion qu'il ne s'agit là que d'une *superstitio praua*. Et enfin, on verra quelles étaient les conséquences légales de la distinction entre une *coniuratio* et une *superstitio praua*.

Les Bacchanales

Les Bacchanales étaient plus qu'une *superstitio*. Tite-Live en montre la vraie nature dès la première phrase de son récit : il s'agit en effet d'une *intestina coniuratio*, d'une conjuration intérieure. Il appelle les Bacchanales au total quatre fois *coniuratio*,³ tandis qu'il ne les situe que deux fois parmi les *religiones prauae*.⁴ Il est important de souligner que les deux termes ne sont pas interchangeables dans le vocabulaire de l'auteur. Les Bacchanales avaient fait partie à l'origine des *religiones prauae* dont, selon le discours du consul Postumius, les autorités romaines se sont toujours efforcées de purifier la ville de peur qu'elles ne « portent atteinte à l'esprit religieux » des Romains.⁵ Mais ces *religiones* ou *superstitiones prauae*, bien qu'il faille à tout prix les empêcher de prendre de l'importance, ne concernent qu'un nombre limité de citoyens. De ce fait, elles ne peuvent pas nuire à l'État romain. Par contre les Bacchanales, au moment de l'éclatement du scandale, ont déjà outrepassé les limites d'une *religio praua* :

³ 39,8,3 ; 14,4 ; 15,10 ; 16,3-4.

⁴ 39,15,3 ; 16,6.

⁵ 39,16,9 : *Iudicabant enim prudentissimi uiri omnis diuini humanique iuris nihil aeque dissoluendae religionis esse quam ubi non patrio, sed externo ritu sacrificaretur* (éd. et trad. A.-M. Adam).

les dieux ... s'emparant des consciences par des rites malsains venus de l'étranger, les poussaient, comme sous l'aiguillon des Furies, vers tous les crimes et toutes les dépravations. ... Cependant, il y aurait moindre mal si ces turpitudes avaient seulement amoindri leur virilité – le déshonneur ne concernant pour l'essentiel qu'eux-mêmes – et s'ils avaient détourné leur main de commettre le crime, leur conscience de le méditer. Jamais il n'y eut dans notre État un mal si grand, où plus de gens et de choses se trouvent impliqués. Tout ce qu'ont commis, ces dernières années, les plus bas instincts, la perfidie, le crime, est issu, sachez-le bien, de ce sanctuaire, et de lui seul. Ils n'ont pas encore produit au grand jour tous les forfaits qui sont le but de leur conspiration. Pour l'heure, cette conjuration impie limite ses méfaits au domaine privé, parce qu'elle n'a pas encore assez de forces pour écraser l'État. Mais le mal croît chaque jour, s'insinuant partout. Il est trop étendu désormais pour rester limité à des intérêts privés : sa cible est maintenant la tête même de l'État.⁶

Il semblerait que ce n'est pas simplement le fait d'avoir commis des crimes contre les bonnes mœurs et des crimes de droit commun qui a justifié la condamnation collective de tous les initiés aux Bacchanales. Le vrai crime, selon Tite-Live, était de commettre tous ces actes en obéissant aux lois d'un organisme autre que l'État romain, et ce qui a encore aggravé la menace était le grand nombre des participants issus de toutes les couches de la société. Contrairement aux autres *superstitiones* ou *religiones prauae*, les Bacchanales étaient ressenties comme une entreprise exclusive et de ce fait coupable, susceptible d'entraîner la fondation d'un nouveau peuple en redéfinissant les liens fondamentaux de la société. En effet, selon la description de Tite-Live, les participants des Bacchanales étaient des hommes, des femmes et de

⁶ 39,15,3–16,8 ; particulièrement 39,15,3 ; 16,1–3 : *deos ... qui prauis et externis religionibus captas mentes uelut furialibus stimulis ad omne scelus at ad omnem libidinem agerent. ... Minus tamen esset si flagitiis tantum affeminati forent – ipsorum id magna ex parte dedecus erat – a facinoribus manus, mentem a fraudibus abstinuissent. Nunquam tantum malum in re publica fuit nec ad plures nec ad plura pertinens. Quicquid his annis libidine, quicquid fraude, quicquid scelere peccatum est ex illo uno sacrario sciote ortum esse. Necdum omnia in quae coniurarunt edita facinora habent. Adhuc priuatis noxiis quia nondum ad rem publicam opprimendam satis uirium est coniuratio sese impia tenet. Crescit et serpit quotidie malum ; iam maius est quam ut capere id priuata fortuna possit ; ad summam rem publicam spectat.*

très jeunes gens au-dessous de vingt ans.⁷ « C'était une foule immense, qui désormais formait presque un autre peuple ».⁸ Ce nouveau peuple avait ses propres lois en contradiction avec celles de l'État romain et les membres y avaient adhéré en prêtant serment de commettre des crimes. Les intentions des dirigeants des Bacchanales, toujours selon la description de Tite-Live, étaient hostiles envers l'État. Les lois du thiasse étaient contraires à tout ce qui était sacré aux yeux des Romains : « ne respecter aucun interdit sacré était ... la plus haute marque de piété »,⁹ raconte Hispala au consul Postumius qui, en entendant son récit, y a même vu la menace de la formation d'un État ennemi à l'intérieur de la République, avec ses institutions imitant d'une façon impie celles de Rome.¹⁰

Une *religio praua* peut donc devenir le point de départ d'une *coniuratio*, c'est pour cette raison qu'elle est potentiellement dangereuse. Suivant le récit livien, pour que la *superstitio/religio praua* devienne une *coniuratio*, il faut la coexistence de quatre éléments :

- 1) renversement des liens sociaux existants, notamment p.ex. soustraire les femmes, les enfants et/ou les esclaves à l'autorité du *pater familias* ;
- 2) engagement par serment de suivre les lois propres à la nouvelle communauté, même au risque d'enfreindre celles de l'ancienne ;
- 3) la nouvelle communauté doit être hostile envers l'ancienne et ses lois en contradiction avec les lois de celle-là ;
- 4) la nouvelle communauté doit être en concurrence avec l'ancienne par le nombre des adeptes.

Si les quatre éléments se présentent ensemble, la *religio praua* devient une façade trompeuse susceptible d'éveiller des scrupules religieux chez les autorités : « Car rien n'est d'apparence plus trompeuse qu'une fausse religion. Là où la majesté des dieux sert de paravent au crime, l'âme est saisie par la crainte de porter atteinte, en punis-

⁷ 39,8,6 ; 10,16 ; 13,10 ; 15,12-13.

⁸ 39,13,14 : *Multitudinem ingentem alterum iuam prope populum esse.*

⁹ 39,13,11 : *Nihil nefas ducere, hanc summam inter eos religionem esse.*

¹⁰ 39,16,3-4.

sant les forfaits humains, à quelque loi divine qui s'y serait mêlée ».¹¹ Les Bacchanales étaient donc présentées à l'opinion publique comme une conjuration née d'une superstition en formant un peuple avec des mœurs, des rites et des lois non seulement en contradiction avec ceux des *Quirites* de Rome mais *dirigés* contre l'État.

Le Christianisme comme coniuratio

Le Christianisme, dans les yeux de la plupart de ses adversaires, a réuni les quatre éléments qui caractérisent une *coniuratio* du type des Bacchanales.

1) Le renversement des liens sociaux

Dans son discours, le consul Postumius souligne le fait qu'appartenir aux Bacchanales exclut le participant de sa famille originelle ainsi que de la communauté des *Quirites* :

Si la débauche, si la démence ont précipité quelqu'un dans ce gouffre, on doit le considérer comme un de ceux avec lesquels il s'est associé pour commettre tous les crimes et toutes les ignominies, et non plus comme l'un des siens.¹²

C'est un discours fort ressemblant aux paroles radicales de Jésus sur la foi chrétienne :

Pensez-vous que je sois apparu pour établir la paix sur terre ? Non, je vous dis, mais bien la division. Désormais en effet, dans une maison de cinq personnes, on sera divisé, trois contre deux et deux contre trois : on sera divisé, père contre fils et fils contre père, mère contre sa fille et fille contre sa mère, belle-mère contre sa bru et bru contre sa belle-mère.¹³

Même s'il est improbable que les Romains aient été familiers avec les textes des évangiles, les conversions de femmes sans l'autorisation de leur tuteur, fréquentes si l'on en croit l'hagiographie chrétienne, ont

¹¹ 39,16,6-7 : *nihil enim in speciem fallacius est quam prava religio. Vbi deorum numen praetenditur sceleribus, subit animum timor ne fraudibus humanis uindicandis diuini iuris aliquid immixtum uiolemus.*

¹² 39,16,5 : *si quem libido, si furor in illum gurgitem abripuit, illorum eum cum quibus in omne flagitium et facinus coniurauit, non suum, iudicet esse.*

¹³ Lc 12,51-53.

du être ressenties comme une menace contre la famille. On sait, qu'au deuxième siècle, on accusait les Chrétiens entre autres de corrompre les jeunes gens et les femmes en les incitant à la désobéissance envers leurs pères et leurs maris païens¹⁴ – autrement dit de se détacher de la société romaine en remplaçant les liens traditionnels par de nouveaux liens les unissant à une nouvelle communauté. Celse accuse carrément les Chrétiens « d'exciter les enfants à la révolte » contre l'autorité parentale.¹⁵ Si l'on y ajoute encore l'égalité des esclaves au sein des communautés chrétiennes, on peut bien comprendre que le Christianisme soit apparu aux païens comme une religion subversive.

2) L'engagement par serment de suivre les propres lois de la nouvelle communauté

La preuve la plus évidente de la croyance que les Chrétiens s'engagent par serment à suivre les lois du Christianisme nous est parvenue par la Lettre 96 de Plinie le Jeune à Trajan. Il constate que les Chrétiens ont l'habitude

de s'engager par serment non à perpétrer quelque crime mais à ne commettre ni vol, ni brigandage, ni adultère, à ne pas manquer à la parole donnée, à ne pas nier un dépôt réclamé en justice.¹⁶

Sans être exprimée aussi clairement, l'idée d'un serment semble encore présente presque un siècle plus tard parmi les griefs du païen Caecilius dans l'*Octavius* de Minucius Felix où le contexte le rapproche du serment des Bacchanales (un crime initiatique) et le vocabulaire de la conjuration de Catilina dans sa description chez Salluste. En effet, Caecilius parle du sacrifice d'un enfant lors de l'initiation chrétienne et il ajoute :

¹⁴ Les jeunes gens : Celse *ap.* Origène, *C. Celse*, III, 55 ; les femmes : Justin, *II. Apol.*

¹⁵ Origène, *C. Celse*, III, 55, 18–19 : οἱ δ'ἰταμώτεροι τοὺς παῖδας ἀφηνιάζειν ἐπαίπουνσι (éd. et trad. M. Borret).

¹⁶ X, 96, 7 : *sequem sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent* (éd. et trad. M. Durr).

telle est la victime qui consacre leur alliance, telle est la complicité dans le crime qui les engage à observer un silence mutuel.¹⁷

Comme Salluste dit à propos de Catilina :

Lors de ces événements, certains ont prétendu qu'après son discours Catilina, au moment où il faisait prêter le serment à ses complices, aurait fait circuler des coupes pleines de sang humain mélangé à du vin ; tous y ayant goûté, après avoir prononcé la formule d'exécration, comme il est d'usage dans les sacrifices solennels, il leur aurait découvert son dessein. Il aurait voulu ainsi rendre plus étroite leur fidélité mutuelle, par la complicité d'un tel forfait.¹⁸

3) L'animosité de la nouvelle communauté envers l'État

Tacite parle expressément de la haine des Chrétiens « pour le genre humain » (*odio humani generis*) pour expliquer comment Néron a réussi de faire accepter au peuple de Rome leur condamnation et exécution massive après le grand incendie. Pour Tacite, il ne fait pas l'ombre d'un doute que la nouvelle communauté formée par les Chrétiens n'est pas neutre envers les peuples de l'Empire. Elle n'est pas seulement réticente dans l'accomplissement de ses devoirs civiques, mais à cause de sa haine elle est hostile et par conséquent dangereuse pour la communauté dont elle est issue. Les Chrétiens méritent tous la mort même s'ils sont innocents de l'incendie et même si leur adversaire, Néron, est encore plus détestable qu'eux. Le Christianisme, comme une secte détachée du Judaïsme, a dû « jouir » d'une très mauvaise réputation. Il a hérité de la méfiance dont les Juifs, un peuple de révoltés, étaient entourés entre autres à cause de

¹⁷ IX,5 : *hac foederantur hostia, hac conscientia sceleris ad silentium mutuum pignerantur* (éd. et trad. J. Beaujeu).

¹⁸ *De Coni. Cat.*, 22 : *Fuere ea tempestate qui dicerent Catilinam, oratione habita, cum ad iusiurandum popularis sceleris sui adigeret, humani corporis sanguinem uino permixtum in pateris circumtulisse ; inde cum post execrationem omnes degustauissent, sicuti in sollemnibus sacris fieri consuevit, aperuisse consilium suum, atque eo ꝛdictitareꝛ fecisse quo inter se fidi magis forent, alius alii tanti facinoris conscii* (éd. et trad. A. Ernout).

leur prosélytisme,¹⁹ à cause de leur « hostilité haineuse »²⁰ envers les non-Juifs et à cause de leurs rites « nouveaux et contraires à ceux des mortels » – comme le dit Tacite. En effet :

Là-bas est profane tout ce qui chez nous est sacré ; en revanche est permis chez eux ce qui est pour nous abominable.²¹

Une affirmation qui est étrangement proche de celle de Tite-Live concernant les initiés aux Bacchanales pour qui « ne respecter aucun interdit sacré était . . . la plus haute marque de piété ».²²

4) Le grand nombre des adeptes

Selon la lettre de Pline, les Chrétiens formaient « une foule de personnes de tout âge, de toute condition, des deux sexes aussi ».²³ Caecilius de l'*Octavius* déplore également la croissance rapide du nombre des Chrétiens, et ses propos sont révélateurs de l'image qu'un intellectuel romain pouvait se faire du Christianisme :

Et voici qu'à présent, tant la mauvaise graine est plus féconde que la bonne, avec les progrès insidieux que fait de jour en jour la dépravation, les rites affreux de cette bande impie se développent dans le monde entier. Il faut révéler cette conspiration dans toute son étendue et la vouer à l'exécration.²⁴

Bref, aux yeux des Romains, les Chrétiens tout comme les initiés aux Bacchanales se montraient différents des adeptes des autres cultes étrangers qualifiés de *superstitiones*. Non pas au niveau des rites qui, généralement secrets ou méconnus, attiraient naturellement toutes sortes de soupçons, mais surtout au niveau de l'organisation. Les

¹⁹ Tacite, *Hist.* V,5 : *Nam pessimus quisque spretis religionibus patriis tributa et stipes illuc congerebant* (éd. H. Le Bonniec).

²⁰ *aduersus omnes alios hostile odium* (ib.)

²¹ *Ib.*, V,4 : *Nouos ritus contrariosque ceteris mortalibus indidit. Profana illic omnia quae apud nos sacra, rursum concessa apud illos quae nobis incesta.*

²² 39,13,11 : *Nihil nefas ducere, hanc summam inter eos religionem esse.*

²³ X,96,9 : *multi enim omnis aetatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus etiam.*

²⁴ IX,1 : *Ac iam, ut fecundius nequiora proueniunt, serpentibus in dies perditis moribus per uniuersum orbem sacraria ista taeterrima impiae coitionis adolescunt. Eruenda prorsus haec et execranda consensio.*

autres cultes n'avaient jamais tenté de remplacer les systèmes sociaux (familiaux et même politiques) existants de l'Empire, et surtout, ils n'avaient jamais été assez efficaces pour qu'on les soupçonne d'un tel dessein.

Le Christianisme, cette nouvelle communauté religieuse qui avait pour but effectivement de changer le monde, s'est vu confronter dans le quotidien à la fois à l'ombre de son passé judaïque et à sa ressemblance structurelle avec les Bacchanales, une affaire traumatisante de la mémoire romaine. Ce rapprochement avec l'affaire des Bacchanales se montre le plus cruellement dans la *Lettre des Martyrs de Lyon et de Vienne aux églises d'Asie et de Phrygie*. A Lyon, le gouverneur ne suit pas la recommandation de Pline et de Trajan, il ne relâche pas les repentis non plus²⁵ – suivant ainsi exactement le procédé des autorités romaines de 186 av. J. C., lorsqu'elles maintenaient aussi en prison ceux des initiés aux Bacchanales qui n'avaient commis aucun crime.²⁶ C'est ce qui ressort aussi des autres pogroms locaux dont les Chrétiens furent souvent victimes au cours du deuxième siècle : dans l'opinion publique qui s'inspirait plus volontiers des rumeurs malveillantes que des résultats de l'investigation de Pline, l'image de la communauté des Chrétiens s'approchait plutôt de celle d'une *coniuratio* dangereuse

²⁵ Eusèbe, *H.E.*, V,1,33 : « ceux qui avaient confessé ce qu'ils étaient, étaient emprisonnés comme chrétiens et aucune autre accusation ne pesait sur eux συνεκλείοντο ὡς Χριστιανοί, μηδεμιᾶς ἄλλης αἰτίας αὐτοῖς ἐπιφερομένης) : mais les autres étaient retenus comme homicides et impudiques (ἀνδροφόνοι καὶ μισοί) » (éd. et trad. E. Grapin). Bien sûr, l'auteur chrétien de la lettre euphémise l'accusation qui pèse sur les chrétiens qui ont avoué l'être, mais même ainsi on voit le motif de la condamnation à deux degrés, comme dans l'affaire des Bacchanales et, malgré l'intention de l'auteur, il est évident que la charge contre les chrétiens obstinés devait être plus lourde que contre les autres.

²⁶ Tite-Live, 39,18,3-4 : *Qui tantum initiati erant ... nec earum rerum ullam in quas iure iurando obligati erant in se aut in alios admiserant eos in uinculis relinquebant. Qui stupris aut caedibus uiolati erant ... eos capitali poena afficiebant* (« Ceux qui avaient seulement été initiés ... mais n'avaient commis ou laisser commettre aucun de ces actes auxquels les obligeait leur serment, ceux-là on les laissait en prison. Ceux qu'avaient souillés les débauches et les crimes de sang ... on les frappait de la peine capitale ».)

de type Bacchanales que de celle d'une simple *superstitio* répugnante, mais inoffensive.

Le Christianisme comme superstitio praua : Pline et Trajan

En l'an 112, Pline est le gouverneur du Pont et de la Bithynie et c'est la première fois dans sa vie qu'il doit s'occuper des Chrétiens. Il ne les connaît pas, il essaye donc de s'informer. Il les interroge, et la description des cultes chrétiens obtenue des apostats l'inquiète. Réunions nocturnes, engagement par un serment, un repas commun évidemment d'un caractère suspect (puisque les accusés s'efforcent de préciser que la nourriture est *promiscuum tamen et innoxium*) :²⁷ suffisamment d'éléments qui permettent de penser à une conjuration²⁸ – mais pas spécialement à l'affaire des Bacchanales, puisque les participants à ces dernières n'étaient pas accusés de consommer une nour-

²⁷ X,96,7 : *Adfirmabant autem hanc fuisse summam uel culpaе suae uel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem conuenire carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere secum inuicem seque sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent. Quibus peractis morem sibi discedendi fuisse rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innoxium ; quod ipsum facere desisse post edictum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hetaerias esse uetueram.* (« Toute leur faute, ou leur erreur, s'était bornée à avoir l'habitude de se réunir à jour fixe avant le lever du soleil, de chanter entre eux alternativement un hymne au Christ comme à un dieu, de s'engager par serment non à perpétrer quelque crime mais à ne commettre ni vol, ni brigandage, ni adultère, à ne pas manquer à la parole donnée, à ne pas nier un dépôt réclamé en justice ; ces rites accomplis, ils avaient coutume de se séparer et de se réunir encore pour prendre leur nourriture, qui, quoi qu'on dise, est ordinaire et innocente ; même cette pratique, ils y avaient renoncé après mon édit par lequel j'avais selon tes instructions interdit les hetaeries ».)

²⁸ La consommation du sang et/ou de la chair humain(e) lors du serment des conjurés est un *topos* typique de l'historiographie et même du roman antique. P. ex. dans l'historiographie : Dion Cass., 71,4,1 – *Boukoloi* ; Salluste, *de Cat. Coni.* 22 ; Florus, *Epitoma* II,12,3,4 ; Plut., *Cic.* 10,4 ; Dion Cass., 37,30 – *Catilina* ; dans la fiction : Achilles Tatius, *Leucippè et Clitophon*, 3,15,4 ; Lollianos, *Phoinikika* ; Parthenios, *Amat. Narr.*, 35 – cités par A. Henrichs, « Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians », dans *KYRIAKON : Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, éd. P. Granfield et J.A. Jungmann (Münster : Aschendorff 1973), 1,18–35.

riture sacrilège. Sachant probablement que le Christianisme était une secte juive, Pline a pu penser à l'histoire du Grec engraissé dans le Temple de Jérusalem en vue d'un sacrifice humain, histoire liée à un serment d'hostilité des Juifs envers les étrangers.²⁹ Pour en avoir le cœur net, Pline fait torturer deux esclaves afin de connaître la vérité au sujet des réunions chrétiennes. Le résultat : *Nihil aliud inueni quam superstitionem prauam, immodicam*.³⁰ D'habitude, on considère cette constatation de Pline comme une sorte d'acquittement, comme l'expression de sa conviction que les Chrétiens ne sont pas coupables de crimes de droit commun, des *flagitia cohaerentia nomini* dont il parle au paragraphe 2. En effet, tout de suite après avoir obtenu ce résultat il suspend les interrogations et soumet la question à la décision de Trajan. Cependant, on ne souligne jamais le fait que Pline continue de parler du Christianisme comme d'un péril (*periculum*) et d'une contagion, infection, épidémie (*contagio*) qu'il trouve nécessaire d'enrayer et possible de guérir (*que uidetur sisti et corrigi posse*). Et le remède pour cette guérison n'est sans doute autre que l'exécution de tous ceux qui s'obstinent à pratiquer cette *superstitio praua, immodica* et le pardon pour ceux seuls qui y renoncent. Dans le dernier paragraphe de la lettre, Pline vante l'efficacité de ses mesures prises contre les Chrétiens :

Il n'est certes pas douteux que les temples qui étaient désormais presque abandonnés commencent à être fréquentés, que les cérémonies rituelles longtemps interrompues sont reprises, que partout on vend la chair des victimes, qui jusqu'à présent ne trouvait plus que de très rares acheteurs. D'où il est aisé de penser quelle foule d'hommes pourrait être guérie si l'on accueillait le repentir.³¹

L'épithète *superstitio praua, immodica*, n'est donc pas seulement l'expression du *mépris* d'un intellectuel romain envers un culte qu'il

²⁹ Flav. Josèphe, *C. Ap.* II,8,91–96.

³⁰ X,96,8.

³¹ (10) *Certe satis constat prope iam desolata templa coepisse celebrari et sacra solemnia diu intermissa repeti passimque uenire uictimarum carnem, cuius adhuc rarissimus emptor inueniebatur. Ex quo facile est opinari quae turba hominum emendari possit, si sit paenitentiae locus.*

considère comme déraisonnable, mais celle de la *méfiance* d'un gouverneur qui doit veiller sur la paix et la prospérité de ses provinces.

Il est évident que le Christianisme, dans l'état où il se présente devant Pline, n'a pas encore atteint le stade de conjuration, alors même que son développement est similaire à celui des Bacchanales. Le Christianisme, cette nouvelle superstition, est né de la perversion de la religion ancienne des Juifs, détestable mais tolérée aux yeux des Romains – comme les Bacchanales naissent de la perversion du culte respectable de Bacchus.³² Le Christianisme grandit en arrachant les nouveaux adeptes de tout âge et des deux sexes à leurs anciennes structures familiales et politiques et en créant de nouveaux liens entre eux, de nouvelles lois, les poussant à ne pas accomplir leurs devoirs civiques – comme les Bacchanales annulent les anciennes responsabilités de leurs membres envers leurs familles et envers l'État. Mais Pline a pu constater que, contrairement aux Bacchanales, le Christianisme ne force pas les nouveaux adeptes à prêter le serment de commettre des crimes : les lois des Chrétiens les obligent justement à n'en commettre aucun. Autrement dit, la *superstitio* du Christianisme, aux yeux de Pline, est en train de devenir une nouvelle communauté, réticente, mais encore sans intentions hostiles envers l'État romain et surtout sans aspirations politiques. Pour cette raison, bien qu'il faille

³² En effet, bien que Pline ne parle pas de l'origine juive de la nouvelle secte, il est invraisemblable qu'il ne la connaisse pas. Ses jeunes contemporains, Tacite et Suétone, témoignent positivement de la conscience qu'ont les intellectuels romains de l'époque des liens étroits entre Chrétiens et Juifs. Tacite, *Annales* 15,44 : (2) *Sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia, quin iussum incendium crederetur. Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit quos, per flagitia inuisos, uulgus Chrestianos appellabat.* (3) *Auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat; repressaque in praesens, exitiabilis superstitio rursum erumpebat, non modo per Iudaeam, originem eius mali, sed per Urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocita aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque.* (4) *Igitur primum correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens haud proinde in crimine incendii quam odio humani generis conuicti sunt.* Suétone, *Claude*, XXV,11 les confond encore avec les Juifs : *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit* (éd. H. Ailloud).

que les autorités se montrent fermes et qu'elles ne laissent pas impunie la désobéissance ouverte aux lois de l'Empire, elles peuvent encore se permettre sans danger de pardonner aux repentis, ce qui n'était plus possible dans le cas des Bacchanales. Heureusement pour les Chrétiens, Trajan et la plupart de ses successeurs partagent l'opinion de Pline, ce qui explique l'absence de persécutions ordonnées par des empereurs au deuxième siècle.

Conclusion

On doit donc conclure que pour Pline, comme pour les intellectuels romains en général, toujours soupçonneux envers les nouveaux cultes, le Christianisme évoquait sans aucun doute le souvenir des Bacchanales. Cette nouvelle *superstitio* qualifiée comme *praua*, *immodica* par Pline, leur ressemblait plus que d'autres, parce qu'elle visait à créer une nouvelle société avec ses propres lois. Elle se retirait volontairement de la vie commune des habitants de l'Empire. S'excluant elle-même de la communauté, elle risquait de devenir un corps étranger à l'intérieur des frontières, un peuple qui pourrait se transformer en ennemi intérieur, en une *coniuratio*, au moment où ses lois se trouveraient en opposition avec celles de l'Empire – comme ç'avait été le cas des Bacchanales, du moins dans la tradition livienne. Pline, à la suite de ses investigations, a pu constater que les lois des Chrétiens, au fond, coïncidaient avec celles des Romains, mais le fait qu'ils s'obstinaient à ne pas obéir à son ordre de sacrifier aux dieux ne lui a pas laissé oublier que cette *superstitio praua* était propre à une communauté potentiellement dangereuse. Il ne manquait qu'un seul des quatre éléments caractéristiques aux Bacchanales, et s'il ne prenait pas les mesures adéquates, le Christianisme risquait de se transformer en une *intestina coniuratio*. Heureusement pour les Chrétiens, la plupart des Empereurs suivirent l'exemple de Pline et de Trajan. Considérant le Christianisme comme une *superstitio praua* et non pas comme une *coniuratio*, ils se sont contentés de mettre à l'épreuve l'obéissance de ceux qui étaient dénoncés sans rechercher systématiquement tous les Chrétiens. Par contre, le fait, qu'il y eut de nombreuses dénonciations et même des pogroms locaux tout au long du deuxième et du troi-

sième siècle suffit à prouver que, dans l'opinion publique, une opinion partagée souvent par les dirigeants des communautés locales, les rumeurs sur les crimes des Chrétiens les faisaient apparenter plus aux *coniurationes* qu'aux *superstitiones*. Mais le langage devient aussi plus dur : chez Tacite et Suétone le Christianisme n'est plus une *superstitio praua*, mais *exitiabilis* et *malefica*, exprimant ainsi que la nouvelle communauté n'accepte pas les règles traditionnelles et devient de ce fait dangereuse pour la survie de l'Empire. Elle doit donc se plier ou disparaître.

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THE SCENT OF A MARTYR

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Summary

Scent has long been associated with the world of the gods. Many of the Greek gods were noted not only for having a powerful smell themselves but also for having sensitive noses and taking great joy in the smell of an altar well-stocked by a faithful follower. The Christian tradition is full of stories of martyrs and subsequently saints who had the aroma of sanctity about them. These stories became part of a larger olfactory understanding of the relationship between humans and the divine. Islam also has significant stories of fragrant martyrs set within a tradition which has an appreciation for scent and its ability to communicate the closeness of purity and Paradise. The aroma of sanctity is often described as an incomparably beautiful perfume, but sometimes the description is more specific: florals such as roses, lilies and violets; spices, including cinnamon, cloves, ginger and myrrh; and food such as apples and bread. Tales describing the aroma of sanctity exist from ancient to modern times and are often explained as deriving from the use of incense and perfumes in funerary rites. This explanation however, does not capture the strength of the symbol and its inherent value of joy in overcoming death and sharing in divine immortality. This study considers how scent acts as a form of communication in martyrologies and conforms with their role to spread the message of the value of the faith, overcoming the barriers of illiteracy, different languages and the passage of time.

In late summer 177 Blandina, Maturus, Sanctus and Attalus, four Christians, were led into the amphitheatre in Lyon to provide a spectacle for the audience assembled to watch them die. We are told in a letter which was sent to the Asian churches at that time that these would-be martyrs were easily distinguished from other arrested Christians who questioned their faith. The four, firm in their beliefs, had not only a confidence and beauty about themselves as they walked through the onlookers, but also exhaled “the sweet odor of Christ” (Musurillo 1972:73). The smell was so strong that those they passed thought that they had perfumed themselves.

The Christian tradition is full of stories of martyrs and subsequently saints who had the aroma of sanctity about them. Christians originally had theological difficulty absorbing some of the rich olfactory traditions of the ancient world which were so closely tied to sacrificial rituals in other religions. But it did not take long before incense and unguents were accepted by Christians.¹ Gradually the understanding of scent in the practice of the tradition came to include more than the meanings inherent in the sacrificial offering of incense. Traditionally these offerings were made in the hope of establishing an order in the relationship between the divine and human worlds. Christianity added an epistemological element to this order. Through scent one could come to know God and how the divine shaped the world.²

The accounts of scented martyrs are less common in Islam, but equally rich in sensual detail. The sweet smell of a martyr is a clear indication that this pure soul had bypassed the torments of the grave and gone directly to Paradise.³ Although the martyrs may have found their place in the Garden, they were thought to provide a communication link between this world and the next, interceding on behalf of believers in both everyday matters as well as the concerns of the afterlife (Smith and Haddad 1981:183). The scent of martyrs, often compared with the fruits of Paradise, intimated the comforting closeness of the Garden.

Tales of divine scent have existed in many different traditions from ancient to modern times; from the United States, Europe, Russia,

¹ Tertullian, referring somewhat sarcastically to the vast quantities of spices used by third century Christians, states: "We certainly buy no frankincense. If the Arabians complain of this, let the Sabæans be well assured that their more precious and costly merchandise is expended as largely in the burying of Christians as in the fumigating of the gods" (*Apology*, Chapter XL11).

² According to Camporesi, plants and their scents had, by medieval times, become so important as symbols in Christianity that "flowers were perceived as a thesaurus for the mystical interpretation of divine messages" (1994:27).

³ In Islam, children, who like martyrs have pure souls, also have a relationship with scent for in Paradise they are said by some to take on the form of birds resting on mountains of musk (Smith and Haddad, 1981:173).

around the Mediterranean, Middle East, India and Sri Lanka. The most common explanation for the aroma of sanctity within the cultures of the Mediterranean is that it came from incense, unguents and perfumes, particularly as they were used in funerary rites.⁴ More recently, there have been scholars who have departed from the theme of the care of the dead as the source for the aroma of sanctity. Regarding the Martyrs of Lyon, Annick Lallemand (1985) believes these explanations are too simple and miss the richness of the symbolism of this perfume for second century Christians. She believes this aroma was a symbol of the joy of a marriage union with the divine. Susan Ashbrook Harvey (1998) furthers this theme in her analysis of scent in the writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–73 CE). A sensual joy is apparent in his *Hymns on Paradise*—writings which she describes as “an olfactory *tour de force*, a dazzling sensory encounter, reminiscent of the Song of Songs in its lush imagery” (1998:122). Along with Ephrem’s descriptions of the sensual delight of fragrance lies the importance of scent in connecting humans with the divine and bringing knowledge of the divine through sensory perception.

Martyrs do connect the human with the divine through their intercessionary skills, as human sacrifices and witnesses to God. Their stories also reach out to connect people over time and place. A prime function of a martyr’s tale is to create an image so compelling that others will want to follow. The martyrology is designed to spread a message about the character, worthiness and truth of both the divine being who inspired such a sacrifice and the one who gave his or her life. Fragrance can be seen as functioning similarly to a martyrology. Like the story, the fragrance emanates out with its presumed proof of divinity and impacts all who perceive it.⁵

⁴ So Camporesi 1986:17–20, Atchley and Cuthbert 1909:108, Rothkrug 1981:131, Deonna, 1939:182. Delehaye, in his study of martyrs, dismisses the scent of sanctity altogether as being due merely to the excitement of the moment (1966:17).

⁵ Classen, Howes and Synnott comment that, “In the past, essences were indicative of the intrinsic worth of the substances from which they emanated. Indeed, to encounter a scent was to encounter proof of a material presence, a trail of existence

John Chrysostom (347–407), commemorating St. Pelagia's funeral procession, compared the power of incense to spread out and perfume the air with the conversations about the acts of the martyrs that people were having as they walked along the road and which he hoped they would continue to speak of after they had gone home.

Let us fill the highway with incense for the road will not appear so decorous although some one set censers all along the way to perfume the air with a sweet odor, as it will appear now, if those who pass along it, relating amongst themselves the contests of the martyrs, return home, each making his tongue a censer that is by perfuming the air with good words and pious thoughts. (Cited in Atchley and Cuthbert 1909:100)

The aroma of sanctity may well have had its point of departure in the scented oils and spices used to embalm the dead and the incenses burned at funerals, but the inherent value of joy of overcoming death, the promise of redemption and the seemingly tangible connection with the spiritual world, are what gave strength to the symbol and insured that it would become a trait associated with saints long after the time most characterized by martyrdom in Christian history. In this study I will consider how scent acts as a form of communication in martyrologies and conforms with their role to spread the message of the value and truth of the faith.

This paper will focus in the main on the aroma of sanctity of Christian and Islamic martyrs but will include some stories of fragrant Christian saints. The martyrs were the precursors of the saints. At one point in Christian history they were the highest ideal, but as the time for martyrdom passed the saints took their place. Martyrologies commonly make use of elements from the previous stories of martyrs to help bolster the status of the present martyr. Following this trend hagiographies have adopted the martyr's scent of sanctity and added it to their saint's stories to improve the status of their heroes and place them firmly in the tradition of the martyrs.

which could be traced to its source" (1994:205). Smell is proof of the holiness of a saint and the closeness of the divine.

Although the role of the aroma of sanctity was originally associated with saints at the time of death, it grew to surround their life as well, and a type of olfactory theology began to develop. The description of Paradise, for example, came to include more elaborate references to the scent of the divine permeating through out. As Christianity spread through the cultures of the Mediterranean, it added to its inventory of scent stories by incorporating a variety of pre-existing folk tales relating scent and the miraculous.⁶ The sweet aromas of sacred purity were not the only smells to be described. A repulsive stench was associated with evil and sin. Bede, for example, recorded in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* a story he heard from a man who dreamed that he visited hell. Along with the flames full of human souls he smelled a stinking vapor (Bk. V, ch. xii).⁷

Whether pleasant or foul, scent was an important means of discovering and knowing the world in a pre-modern age. As Classen explains,

The concept of the odor of sanctity is, in fact, the essence of a whole way of life and thought; a rich and rare fragrance, scented with holy pain and mystical rapture, impossible to distill from the secularized values of modernity (1998:60).

⁶ An example of this came from Merida, Spain where St. Eulalia was martyred in 304. On December 10, the day she was commemorated, the three trees by the altar on her tomb would bloom profusely despite the winter season. If the blooms were slow in coming it signified a bad omen for the year to come and the community knew they must pray to the martyr. If their prayers were successful the flowers would bloom, giving off the scent of nectar. It is likely that these trees had been worshipped before Christianity (Atchley 1909:111).

⁷ A similar description of a trip to hell is found in the prologue to the "Summoner's Tale" in the *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer lends some humor to his story of the stink of corruption. The Summoner, having a very low opinion of all friars, recounts the story of a friar visiting hell in a vision. Seeing no friars there, the friar assumes it is because they have such grace. But his accompanying angel commands Satan to lift up his tail: "Shewe forth thyn ers, and lat the frere se/ Where is the nest of freres in this place." Twenty thousand friars swarm like bees out of the devil's "ers" (1977:134). The fact that Chaucer ties together the worst smell of Satan's world and religious corruption shows us that by the fourteenth century this notion of the stench of hell was a commonplace beyond the confines of the church.

The Language of Scent and the Divine Nose

There is a long history of the use of scent to communicate between the human and divine worlds. The ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans all gave the gift of scent to their gods believing that it was fully appreciated. The wide use of incense in sacrifice indicates how common was the belief that the gods as well as humans had sensitive noses and could be persuaded to look favorably on those making the offering. The Babylonian gods' appreciation at receiving a sacrifice with incense is picturesquely drawn in the Epic of Gilgamesh when describing Utnapishtim's offering after the flood:

The gods smelled the savour,
The gods smelled the sweet savour
The gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer.⁸

In another flood story, Ovid describes the uproar which was caused at the council of the gods when Jupiter proposed to deluge the earth to punish humanity. The pressing question of the moment for the gods was, "What will earth's form be in future when all mortals are gone? *And who will bring to the altars incense?*" (*italics mine*).⁹ But people hoped for more than just to delight their gods. It was hoped that the pleasing smell of Noah's offering after the flood was not only enjoyed by God but that it would persuade him to soften his heart towards humans (Gen 8:21).¹⁰

It was commonly thought that the gods received sustenance as well as pleasure from the offerings of scent. The previous comparison between the gods and flies implies that those gods are not just interested in breathing in the sweet savour of the sacrifice but like insects, they

⁸ Gilgamesh Epic Tablet XI; cf. Tigay 1982:159–161.

⁹ *Metamorphoses* I 11; tr. R. Humphries.

¹⁰ Scent can also be used to call the attention of a saint in order to make use of their intercessionary abilities. In a rather humorous story collected by Smith and Haddad, it was recorded that a woman made a petition at a saint's tomb in Cairo. Just to make sure that the saint was awake in his tomb and paying attention, she rubbed garlic over the foot of the tomb to agitate him (1981:190).

will take it in as food. The martyr Polycarp was described as smelling like baking bread when he was burned alive—sustenance for both human and divine to share (Walsh 1991:57). There are references to both Christian and Muslim saints smelling like the food of heaven—manna. The tomb of Saint André for example, is reported to produce not only a scented oil but also a wheat-based manna (Deonna 1939:258). More recently (1958) Louis Massignon described some of the unusual occurrences which he perceived during his study of the necropolis at Cairo—the movement of saints' bodies, their sweating of blood and of the oil of manna (in Smith and Haddad 1981:186). When offering nourishment to the gods, whether in the form of incense, food or martyrs, it is the scent carried on the rising smoke which would reach the spiritual world. The smell would tell the divine beings that their loyal worshippers wished to sustain them.

This message of desire to share nourishment conveys with it a love for the other and was not only sent from humans to the gods but also the reverse. St. Ephrem writes of Christ as both the bread and fragrance of life. In his hymns of Paradise he describes how the scent of Paradise “gives nourishment to all at all times, and whoever inhales it is overjoyed and forgets his earthly bread.”¹¹ The martyr Perpetua (d. 203) describes her companion Saturus's vision: “All of us were sustained by a most delicious odor that seemed to satisfy us. And then I woke up happy” (as quoted in Salisbury 1997:113). Although this odor comes from flowers in the garden of Paradise it is thought to be sustaining and satisfying.

Not only does Paradise have a particular scent but some gods were thought to have scents themselves which other gods could perceive and by which they could be identified by humans.¹² The Homeric Hymns tell of these perfumes lingering on the gods' clothes and in the

¹¹ *Hymns on Paradise* 11:15; tr. Brock 1990.

¹² Hera is described in the *Iliad* as using perfume to seduce Zeus. This perfume is strong enough to penetrate all the earth and sky as well as have the desired affect on Zeus (14:170).

places where they slept.¹³ St. Ephrem continues in this tradition when he writes of exquisite perfumes which reveal God's presence (Harvey 1998:114). Yet Yahweh was never said to have been associated with an odor.¹⁴ Despite this lack of scent, the Jews thought he had a far more discerning sense of smell than any of the other gods with whom he was compared. In the story of the Maccabean mother and her seven sons in Midr. Lam 1:16, the youngest of the boys compares his god's nose to the noses of Caesar's gods which, along with his god's mouth, eyes, ears, hands, feet and throat, is clearly more powerful than any other god's nose. The young boy says to Caesar, "In regard to your idol, they have noses but do not smell,"¹⁵ but in connection with our God it is written, 'And the Lord smelled the sweet odor' "¹⁶ (Neusner 1989:177). Not only do we find out here that the noses of other gods are inept compared to Yahweh, but we also learn that his nose is so sensitive that it can perceive the savour of those who are sacrificing themselves for his laws. The implication is that this god, unlike others, could distinguish through smell the goodness of a faithful soul.¹⁷

Christians understood God to have this same skill. Not only was he able to smell those who know him but as it was the aroma of sanctity,

¹³ The hymns to Dionysus 26:1–9, Demeter 2:275–281, Apollo 3:182–206, and Dionysus 7:32–54 all refer to the smell of the particular god. In the Orphic hymns Orpheus travels to the underworld and learns, among other things, about the different incenses which were pleasing to the different gods and by which they were known.

¹⁴ Atchley reasons that this is because he was originally the Storm-god of the Israelites noted for his tools of thunder, rain and lightning (1909:75). Yet it is not likely that this is the reason why Yahweh has no scent for often there is ozone in the air following thunderstorms and ozone, coming from the Greek word *ozein*, "to smell," does have a noticeable aroma as does rain.

¹⁵ Cf. Psalm 115:6.

¹⁶ Cf. Gen 8:21.

¹⁷ In the *Iliad* Hector always keeps Zeus' altar full of libations and perfumes (24:71–76). For this act the god remembers and honors Hector's piety thus demonstrating that there were other gods who were thought by their followers to have the power to smell an honest worshipper.

he was the one who gave them the scent. In the story of the martyrs of Lyon, the “sweet aroma of Christ” is a reference to 2 Cor 2:14–15:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. (New Revised Standard Version)

Those who know, and thus have faith in God, are able to spread the fragrance of redeeming faith. This aroma of sanctity is bestowed by God and returns to him as the martyrs are sacrificed for the love of God. In this way God and those who sacrifice themselves for him are known to each other through a direct form of communication unmediated by words.

It is not only divine beings who are able to smell a sweet soul but as the martyrologists insist, this aroma is perceptible by humans too. David Miller discusses a variety of mythological examples of people who are tested by their ability to distinguish between good and evil through smell. He concludes that the mythological testimony is clear: in matters of daimon, soul, and the imaginal, not only are eyes and ears poor witnesses, as Heraclitus had said, but also so are touch and taste. Neither reason nor sense can finally help. Finally only the nose knows (1996).

Physical Communication of Scent

The ability to have the soul affected by scent is described in the florid hagiography of the Dutch woman St. Lydwine (1380–1433), by Huysmans (1923). This story is a vivid example of how the aroma of sanctity came to be associated with saints during their lifetime.¹⁸ When she was a young girl, she became sick and suffered from a wide variety of maladies which caused her flesh to break out into putrified tumors which bred black-headed worms who fed on her ulcers (Huysmans

¹⁸ Constance Classen discusses St. Lydwine, Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), and Benoite of Notre Dame of Laus (1647–1718) as illustrative examples of many hundreds of saints who were known for their aroma of sanctity (1998:36–60).

1923:51–54). In spite of this and the fact that she was constantly vomiting and bleeding, her body gave off a delicate perfumed aroma. Her room was filled with a fragrance which at first had a taste of spices: ginger, cloves and cinnamon. These were later replaced by the scent of fresh-cut flowers: rose, violet, lily (Huysmans 1923:189). But even more powerful than a smell or a taste, her aroma had the effect of penetrating the conscience and horrifying devils (Huysmans 1923:1929).¹⁹

In Huysmans' version, St. Lydwine's aroma of sanctity was remarkably strong in its ability to communicate, in the clarity of its message and in its direct link to the conscience. This scent was supposed to bring with it a knowledge of the Christian understanding of sanctity and sin.

The description of the power of St. Lydwine's aroma is very similar to Ephrem's understanding of how scent works in communicating the essence of god. In his hymns, "Smell provides the image of salvation no less than its process, an image grasped and known by a physical experience so basic that the body cannot live without it" (Harvey 1998:124). Scent is drawn into the recipients and becomes a part of their soul. The ancient belief that the soul resided in the breath is exemplified by the Roman practice of trying to capture the last breath of a dying relative so as to keep some of their soul (Classen 1994:44). This act is reminiscent of the Egyptian "nose-kiss" referred to in the Song of Songs. As the lovers speak of uniting, the line "Let . . . the fragrance of your breath [be] like apples" refers to the taste of a kiss. The word for "breath" indicates the nose and refers to the Egyptian "nose-kiss" involving smell more than taste (Murphy 1990:187). To illustrate how intimate and sensual this nose-kiss was, Murphy cites a

¹⁹ Hagiographies also tell of the power scent has to effect physical change in people's health. The powerful odour which came from the tomb of St. Maurilius was said to heal the sick as was the perfume from the blossoms which grew by the tombs of Saints Eulalia and Julian (Atchley 1909:110–111). A unique example of the strength of a saint's aroma concerns that of St. Martin of Tours. During a terrible storm sailors on board a ship prayed to St. Martin and the fragrance of balsam spread over the ship. As the smell covered the ship the sea became calm (Atchley 1909:109).

line from an Egyptian love poem: “it is the breath of your nose that keeps me alive” (1990:187).

Intimacy and Scent

As mentioned at the outset, Harvey compares the lushness of fragrance metaphors in Ephrem’s hymns of Paradise with that of the Song of Songs. Scent plays a significant part in the sensual delight of the song. Right from the start we are told that “flowing perfume” is the name of the lover. Here sound becomes less significant than scent. What is remarkable is that when that name is spoken it *smells* wonderful implying a proximity between the lovers. The intimacy of the lovers is conveyed in images of scent; she is nard and he is a sachet of myrrh and a cluster of henna.

Daniel Boyarin convincingly argues in his book *Dying for God* that an essential element of martyrdom is dying for the passionate love of God. He speaks of the visual eroticism present in Jewish and Christian martyrologies.²⁰ To illustrate this eroticism he discusses the third century midrash on Exodus, the Mekhilta, which interprets Akiva’s martyrdom through the insertion of portions of the Song of Songs. The beloved is described with images of colourful and shapely beauty, but the erotic element in martyrdom can be extended beyond the visual to include the sense of smell. Akiva speaks of his beloved, God, the beloved of all of Israel, whose “cheeks are like perfumed gardens, yielding fragrance” (cited in Boyarin 1999:111).

Christian interpreters, beginning with Origen in the third century, have written more on the Song of Songs than on any other book of the Hebrew Bible. Bede, setting the tone for later medieval commentaries, celebrated the song’s female, not as Israel or the martyr Akiva but as the unblemished church of the saints (Murphy 1990:26). Thus the saints, who followed in the path of the martyrs, were seen as the scented lovers of God.

²⁰ Boyarin follows the reasoning of Elizabeth Castelli in her feminist critique of female martyrologies (1999:111).

A sense of intimacy and direct communication comes not only from a proximity in space but lasts through time as well. Elizabeth Castelli, for example, pinpoints the martyrologist's "desire to situate contemporary readers/hearers in continuous relation to events of the distant and more recent past in which divine activity has touched human existence directly" (1995:9). An example of this ability to span the ages occurs through the link of scent in the Shia tradition. It was told of Ali, husband of Fatima, and father of the martyr Husayn, that when he was travelling with his companions he came to Karbala. He fell asleep under that tree and dreamed that its branches bowed down to the ground and that congealed blood flowed from them. He saw Husayn drowning in the blood but heard his son being told that Paradise was waiting for him. Ali knew then that Husayn would die at that spot. When Ali woke up he asked his companion, Ibn Abbas, to look for gazelle dung buried under the tree. After the manure was found Ali smelled it and knew that Jesus had smelled it before. He then told Ibn Abbas the story of Jesus at Karbala. Jesus had journeyed through Karbala and saw a group of gazelles weeping. He found out that they wept because this was the spot where Husayn would be killed and buried in a soil "more fragrant than musk" (Ayoub 1978:238). Jesus took some of the gazelle dung and smelled it, saying it was sweet because of the sweet grasses of that spot from which the gazelles had eaten. He found a safe place to save the dung so that Husayn's father, Ali, might smell it "that it may be for him a consolation and a relief" (Ayoub 1978:238). Ali asked Ibn Abbas to keep the dung until it would become congealed blood, a sign that Husayn had been killed. The dung stayed in Ibn Abbas's sleeve until the day Husayn was killed when it gushed out as hot blood (Ayoub 1978:238).

In this story smell has the power to make an accordion of time. Past, present and future are folded together along with dream-time. The passage of hundreds of years shrinks to an afternoon. The point of telling was before the death of Husayn and after the death of Jesus, but their lives are joined in the story. The one constant throughout all the layers of time and that which bound Jesus, Husayn and Ali together was the sweet smell of the gazelle manure. Scent was the symbol of

sanctity which connected Jesus, the prophet and Husayn, the grandson of the prophet Mohammed. It was something not only those related to holy families were able to perceive but other people and wild animals were able to sense the sweetness of the soil and grasses at the place where the future death would occur. As the different times fold together in this story the implication is that time is not a barrier to the spread of the aroma of sanctity. The function of a martyrology, which Castelli pointed out, of placing the reader/listener in continuous relation to the events of the past, is aided in this tale by the power of scent. Ibn Abbas is the first to hear the story of Jesus' knowledge of Husayn's martyrdom and he can smell the truth of the story and of the divine.

The long life and connecting power of scent is clearly presented in Deonna's discussion of scented martyrs. Deonna divides his catalogue of scented Christian saints and martyrs according to when they emitted their aroma of sanctity: some during their lives, some at the time of death and burial, and by far the greatest number, are those whose remains continued to smell sweet for decades and even centuries later. These martyrologies and hagiographies promise a physical intimacy with the martyrs and saints and their audience through scent.

From Martyr to Martyr

Not only does scent connect a martyr with his or her audience but it can also join different martyrs together. An example of this is to be found in the martyrology of Qazi Nuru'llah which implicitly links his sanctity with that of Husayn through the scent of an apple. During the time of the Mogul Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) Qazi Nuru'llah was killed for being a Shia.²¹ A version of his death still told among Shi'i Muslims and Hindus in Agra is that his body was deposited outside of Agra. After three days some herdsmen were attracted by its sweet odor and found that it had not decomposed (Husted 1993:272). Another hagiographic version of the story written in 1919 was that the body had been put in a slaughter-house garbage

²¹ Wayne Husted has collected a number of martyrologies of Qazi Nuru'llah (Husted 1993).

dump and the martyr's blood transformed the stench into a sweet smell. "As the odor spread throughout the wilderness, so the news of this miracle spread throughout the city. Large groups of people began to perform pilgrimages to the site" (quoted by Husted 1993:272). A letter published in 1916 and written by a visitor to the martyr's shrine centuries after Qazi Nuru'llah's death commented on the specific smell of fresh apples emitted from the tomb on two separate occasions. He continued on to say that he "learned that his was a miracle such as to be found at the shrine of Imam Husayn where people often perceive the smell of apple" (quoted by Husted 1993:272).

The scent of apple has a long history in the Shia tradition. The hadith of al-Ghullabi (d. 298/910) told of how Gabriel had given Mohammed an apple of Paradise. When he ate the apple its juices entered his loins and he impregnated his wife Khadija who conceived their daughter Fatima. Fatima stands out among women in the Shia tradition for she was the mother of the King of Martyrs, Husayn. In this role she is often compared with Mary, mother of Jesus. Mohammed believed he smelled the fragrance of Paradise in Fatima (Vaglieri 1995:847).²² Gabriel also gave Husayn and his brother Hasan an apple, pomegranate and quince from Paradise, when they were children. The fruits had the power to replace whatever was eaten of them until two of them disappeared when Fatima and Hasan died. Only the apple was left then and its powers had evaporated. At Karbala, Husayn bit into it just before he died to try to quench his thirst. The apple too disappeared but Husayn's son later smelled apple coming from his father's tomb

²² Mohammed was said to have a special appreciation for the sense of smell—pleasant odors, women and prayer were three things dear to him (Miller 1996). His reliance on smell as a means of becoming close to someone is clear in the hadith of al-Sakhawi who paints a picture of intimacy between Mohammed and his cousin's children particularly through smell. At one of the first battles in the fight for Islam, Mohammed had the difficult task of telling the family of his cousin, Ja'far b. Abi Talib, that he had been killed. He embraced his cousin's children, wept and smelled them (Gil'adi, 1993:375). It was as if somehow by taking their scent into himself he could better share their pain.

(Husted 1993:273).²³ Husted argues that the smell of apples belongs to a reservoir of images within the Shia tradition (1993:273). The presence of this aroma at the shrine of Qazi Nuru'llah implies that this martyr reflects at least some of the greatness of Husayn.

Conclusion

Scent belongs to the reservoir of images within both Christian and Shia martyrologies. The similarity in scent of the martyrs across the ages does not imply that the more recent ones are mere echoes of the past. Qazi Nuru'llah acts within a time and place distinct from that of Husayn even though he has the same aroma. This is also true for the martyrs of Lyon who, although they lived in a different time and place from Christ, still shared in his aroma. By having the feature of scent in common with prior martyrs, martyrologists implicitly remind readers of previous religious heroes and place the present martyr within a recognizable hall of fame.²⁴ The addition of similarities such as scent in martyrologies works to make the present time comparable in grandeur to the past and provide a structure for understanding a specific time both in its particularity and as it stands in a continuum of events outside of time.

²³ The association of scent with a Muslim martyr is connected to the tradition of burying a martyr in his or her bloody clothes. The injunction to let the blood of the martyrs be their purification is said to have been given by the Prophet regarding those slain in the battle of Uhud—"Shroud them in their blood and do not wash them. For no man who is injured in the way of God but that he shall come on the day of resurrection with his blood gushing out of his veins" (hadith as quoted in Ayoub 1987:72). The relationship between the purity of the blood-soaked clothes and the fragrance of the martyr is also remarked on in this hadith which continues by saying, "The color shall be that of blood and the odor that of musk" (Ayoub 1987:72).

²⁴ There are many ways martyrologists link their protagonists other than through their scent. Husted tells of the stories describing the similarity of the healing powers in the soil at both Husayn's and Qazi's shrine (1993:274). In two versions of the story of the Maccabean martyrs (b. Git. 57b and Midr. Lam 1:16), the mother is compared with Abraham and his courageous willingness to sacrifice his son Issac (Doran 1980:219). Not only does the mother gain an aura of "manly" strength through this comparison, but the readers of these stories are reminded of the religious mythology of the tradition.

In the stories of martyrs the aroma of sanctity connects the human and divine worlds and spreads a message to all who will breathe it in with their soul. St Ephrem even goes so far as to use scent as a metaphor for martyrs themselves:

Incenses are, like the martyrs, cast into the fire.
 Their scents rise up like their good Lord
 Who by means of His death breathed out the fragrance of His life.

(As cited by Harvey 1998:120)

The scent of a martyr is not the scent of death, but the sweet smell of life. It is the intimate nose-kiss of a martyrology conveying an image which, overcoming both the barriers of illiteracy and different languages, serves to connect all who perceive it and establish a group communion.

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REVIEW ARTICLES

Recent Studies on Western Esotericism: Some Reflections

RICHARD CARON, JOSCELYN GODWIN, WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF & JEAN-LOUIS VIEILLARD-BARON (eds.), *Ésotérisme, Gnoses & imaginaire symbolique: Mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre* (Gnostica, 3)—Leuven: Peeters 2001 (xii, 948 p.) ISBN 90-429-0955-2 (pbk.) EUR 70.00.

ROELOF VAN DEN BROEK & CIS VAN HEERTUM (eds.), *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition* (Pimander, 4)—Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan 2000 (432 p.) ISBN 90-71608-10-7 (cloth) US\$ 51.00.

OLAV HAMMER, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Studies in the History of Religions, 90)—Leiden, Boston & Cologne: Brill 2001 (xi, 547 p.) ISBN 90-04-12016-5 (hb.) EUR 214.85, US\$ 173.00.

MIKAEL ROTHSTEIN (ed.), *New Age Religion and Globalization* (RENNER Studies on New Religions, 5)—Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 2001 (178 p.) ISBN 87-7288-792-3 (pbk.) EUR 23.00.

During the last 15 years, the study of western Esotericism has been moving gradually from the margins of academic interest into more recognized areas of research. Valuable contributions both in historical and analytical regards helped to shape what can be called a new discipline. After a decade of fruitful research it might be time now to reflect on what has been gained and what still waits for scholarly scrutiny. The volumes reviewed in this article are a fairly good starting point for this task, because they provide us with a rich picture of the present state of research into western Esotericism. Since it is not possible in this brief survey to do justice to those contributions in detail, I restrict myself to some general remarks, trying to locate the volumes in the broader context of this new field of research.

I

There can be no doubt that the mentor of the study of western Esotericism is Antoine Faivre. In his impressive oeuvre he not only dedicated his research to detailed examination of historical topics, ranging from German mysticism and theosophy to philosophy of nature and vampirism, but also provided the scientific community with an interpretational framework for the study of western Esotericism that has gained wide currency today. His definition of Esotericism as a 'world-view' with certain elements—doctrine of correspondences, 'living nature,' 'imagination and mediations,' 'experience of transmutation'—is a valuable tool for making visible the 'Esoteric' currents underlying western culture and western history of thought from antiquity through today. Given this remarkable and influential oeuvre, it is more than understandable that Antoine Faivre is honored with a *Festschrift* consisting of 61 (!) essays written by friends, pupils, and colleagues—almost a 'who's who' of the study of western Esotericism. The contributions (in French, English, and German) cover a wide spectrum of themes and their arrangement reflects the research areas Faivre has been focusing on during the last 40 years (very helpful is the bibliography of Faivre's works). The last section—"Méthodologie(s) et perspectives en histoire de l'Ésotérisme"—gives some interesting thought to the question where we are and where to move on.

As always in such volumes, the individual contributions differ in quality and relevance. A few of them are quite superficial and general, while others add considerable new insight either historically or systematically. On the whole, this volume impressively shows the enrichment the study of Euro-American religious history has achieved by applying Faivre's taxonomies. However, it is not only the richness that strikes the reader, but also the absence of further themes, which could have been subsumed under the rubric 'Esotericism'. Almost entirely missing is astrology, which is astonishing given the fact that this discipline is one of the cornerstones of Esoteric culture (besides alchemy and magic). Furthermore, non-Christian Esotericism seems to be of minor interest to the contributors: The decisive contribution of Islamic thinking to western Esotericism is omitted more or less completely, while Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah are mainly dealt with in their Christian—or, rather, Protestant—adaptations. Along with this emphasis goes a certain disregard of the vivid Esoteric discourse in late antiquity and medieval times.

Let me emphasize that I do not direct this criticism against the editors or the work of Antoine Faivre; I just spotlight lacunae in the discussions to date and call to mind where fruitful inquiries might be found in the future. If we realize that the taxonomies we use are likely to give privilege to Christian traditions, we should, in my view, adjust them.

II

The question of defining Esotericism is closely related to another problem: How to define 'Hermeticism' and 'Gnosis'? In the introduction to the volume *From Poimandres to Jakob Böhme* Roelof van den Broek talks of the "more 'practical' Hermetica which included magic, alchemy and astrology" (p. 14). It might be concluded that Hermetism and Hermeticism belong to the more general taxonomy of Esotericism but comprise those traditions referring explicitly—or implicitly?—to Hermes Trismegistus. Since this Greco-Egyptian god is usually acknowledged as the mythical 'founder' of the esoteric worldview, it is notoriously hard to draw a line between Hermetic and Esoteric writings. Since the 1960s there has been a controversial discussion about the differences between Hermetism, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Gnosis, and Esotericism. I do not intend to venture a solution here, but what strikes me as interesting is the fact that in this volume no explicit mention is made of Faivre's—and, subsequently, Wouter J. Hanegraaff's—heuristic definition of Esotericism. My hunch is that it would be feasible to use a general taxonomy of Esotericism and regard Hermetic and Gnostic writings as traditions that make those worldviews visible in certain cultural circumstances.

In so doing it will become obvious that the oeuvre of Gilles Quispel—on occasion of his eightieth birthday the papers of the present volume were read on a symposium at the University of Amsterdam—is closely related to that of Antoine Faivre. Besides the dispute (at times quite theoretical) about 'correct' terminologies, what is at stake is the deep-reaching impregnation of western culture, religion, and science with philosophical and religious concepts originating from Hellenistic antiquity. From this perspective, Esotericism is not the 'shadow of rationality, science, and enlightenment' but its *identical twin*.

The volume under review is an important contribution to this often-neglected relationship. It comprises not only in-depth studies that were presented to the Amsterdam symposium; in addition it makes available major articles of Gilles Quispel and Roelof van den Broek that were published elsewhere but demand a wider audience. What most of the essays share is

an empathetic approach to their subject. Although there can be no doubt about the authors' solid historical knowledge, from a methodological point of view it seems problematic to 'use' the documents for providing means to solve human problems of our time. Peter Kingsley, for instance, writes in his "Introduction to the Hermetica": "Even those who are most sympathetic to [Hermetic teaching] tend to erect grand schemes of esoteric 'doctrine'—completely missing out the human dimension and creating a parody out of something which is richly intimate in meaning" (p. 19, without mentioning Faivre or others). Later he complains that "[i]t is, to say the least, a great shame that this text has been so little approached and appreciated from a human angle" (p. 28); "What we have here in this Hermetic text is not some intellectual composition, but an *accurate portrayal* of the *realities* of the mystical path" (p. 29, italics mine). If we follow this program, we will end up in phenomenology and theology. It is exactly this affirmative 'emic' approach to the study of Esotericism that causes immense difficulties for academic research. To change the taxonomies of our definitions is one thing, throwing them away and replacing them by an emotional manifesto—which is not subject to falsification—brings us back to Rudolf Otto and his 'Sacred.'

From Poimandres to Jakob Böhme is a very welcomed addition to the study of western Esotericism. It can foster a better comprehension of modern western thought's ancient and medieval roots, which are frequently passed over. At the same time the essays must be confronted with a more systematic approach that will bear fruit in future research.

III

Western Esotericism shares a certain amount of ideas and concepts with the 'cultic milieu' usually called 'New Age.' While this has been acknowledged in quite a few studies—I only mention the standard reference work by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture* (1996)—, there has been lacking a study scrutinizing those relationships from a systematic, analytical perspective. With Olav Hammer's PhD thesis *Claiming Knowledge* this gap becomes smaller. The author's task is "to understand some of the mechanisms by which a number of modern esoteric currents have attempted to modernize, democratize and legitimize themselves, adapting themselves to an increasingly hostile cultural environment" (p. xiv). This is a very interesting question, and Hammer moves towards an answer in three steps: A first section illuminates the methodological background, the second section introduces what Hammer calls the three discursive strategies—namely 'tradition,'

‘rationality and science,’ and ‘experience’—, and the third section applies all three strategies to the particular case of modern reincarnation concepts. Singling out those three strategies provides the author with a very useful tool for analyzing esoteric discourse in the 19th and 20th centuries. His case is well argued and the strict analytical perspective maintained throughout the study adds to the impression that this book is a significant improvement of academic theory with regard to religion in the modern age. It would have been interesting to add a further dimension, that is the discursive strategies within the *academia*, which had decisive impact on the Theosophical Society and the esoteric scene in general. Maybe the ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ approaches are not as separated as Hammer suggests.

The strong and coherent focus on theoretical questions, along with the author’s assumption that esoteric claims are entirely based on social construction of knowledge, tradition, etc. (here I missed Horst Stenger’s *Die soziale Konstruktion okkultur Wirklichkeit* [1992]), has its price, though. One price is historical accuracy. In almost every case study used to demonstrate his system of interpretation Hammer restricts himself to very brief and general sketches that often carry him away from the historical evidence. Maybe it would have been wise to limit the case studies to a few paradigmatic ones and include more secondary literature. For instance, if Hammer had been acquainted with ethnographic research into modern western shamanism—in particular Galina Lindquist’s *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene* (1997)—, he could have avoided over-simplifications of ‘neo-shamanisms’ (cf. pp. 135–139) and instead could have used this evidence as a clear example of complex strategies carried out between the academic and popular fields of religious discourse. But even his detailed case study on reincarnation can be criticized from a historical point of view. Hammer’s notion that around 1800 “belief in reincarnation was almost unknown in the West” (p. 455) and that “[t]he first documents that discuss reincarnation in the modern age [...] date from the end of the Enlightenment” (p. 457), is likely to cause a puckered brow among historians. If Hammer had consulted Helmut Zander’s massive study *Geschichte der Seelenwanderung in Europa* (1999), he could have known that F.M. van Helmont had laid the ground for a thorough European discourse on reincarnation (which in fact goes back to earlier periods) and that around 1800 this debate was highly developed and popularized by J.G. Schlosser and others.

This critique should not diminish the importance of Hammer's study for the understanding of modern western Esotericism. Rather it serves as a reminder that we need both—a strong systematic framework and thorough historical analysis.

IV

An example of this combination is the fourth book under review. Furthermore, it shows how the study of western Esotericism and New Age religion can be fruitfully brought together with more general issues of contemporary religious and cultural developments. Being an upshot of the vibrant RENN-ER ("Research Network on New Religions") project of the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, *New Age Religion and Globalization* comprises "General Perspectives" and "Particular Cases." Of crucial importance for the general perspectives is the essay by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, because he develops a systematic framework for the relationship between globalization and New Age religion. Proposing that "the globalization of New Age spirituality is more appropriately seen as an aspect of global Americanization" (p. 16), he raises doubts against the notion that the spreading of new religions in Africa or Asia is to be subsumed under the rubric 'globalization of the New Age movement.' A clear definition of what we mean by 'New Age' indeed is mandatory. If we classify this religious movement with Hanegraaff as "characterized by a popular western culture criticism expressed in terms of a secularized esotericism" (p. 21), the so-called globalization (which is in itself a hazy theoretical concept) will reveal contradictory processes and it must be asked how a movement entirely related to a western context can be 'globalized' in the first place. The discrepancy must be addressed that on the one hand, 'New Agers' claim the vision of a global human change together with spiritual awakenings and peaceful relationships of an almost cosmic dimension, and that on the other hand those people are notoriously ignorant to local, native, and non-western spiritualities. In fact, New Age religion turns out to be "a paradoxical phenomenon that is profoundly influenced by the very same culture it criticizes" (p. 22). Hence, it is itself an aspect of western spiritual imperialism.

This general impression is confirmed by the case studies in the volume's second part, although in a more differentiated manner. When Gordon Melton in an important essay analyzes the historical development of Reiki healing traditions, it becomes clear that we are not only dealing with an (imperial) globalization of western concepts but also with a 'westernization' of Asian

traditions. Other essays emphasize the market paradigm, the 'spiritualization of money' and the global spread of consumerism. While the significance of those approaches to the volume's general topic is not always clear and a bit of redundancy seems to be unavoidable, these contributions nevertheless help to understand the mechanisms of New Age cultic milieu's appropriation and transformation within a global setting.

All contributors seem to agree that New Age religion is a bricolage of western and non-western elements that are put together in a typically modern western attitude. Olav Hammer persuasively argues that "the principle mechanism of doing this, is by forcing these exotic elements into a fairly rigid, pre-existing interpretive mould. Thereby, to the believer, the same message does indeed seem to come from everywhere" (p. 56). This, of course, is a good description of what is going on. But one question is not addressed in the volume: Is this really a new mechanism? Firstly, the imperial and colonial interpretation of foreign cultures is a feature well known from western discourse since early modern times. Secondly, it might be asked, if the notion of "the same message from everywhere" is not the same rhetoric as that implied by the 'praxis of concordance,' which Faivre has proposed as a secondary characteristic of Esotericism. The search for a unified and holistic model of cosmos and self, together with the notion that every philosophy and religion—disparate as they seem at first glance—come down to one basic truth, is a feature of Esotericism from antiquity through today. Subsequently, the 'imperial' connotation is inherent in Esotericism itself. By applying a western model for the whole of mankind New Age religion turns out to be a legitimate heir of earlier Esotericism.

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Parsis of India: Two Recent Publications

JESSE S. PALSETIA, *The Parsis of India. Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Brill's Indological Library, vol. 17)—Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill 2001, 368 p., 26 b/w ill., ISBN 90-04-12114-5 (cloth) Euro 91,-.

PHILIP G. KREYENBROEK in collaboration with SHEHNAZ NEVILLE MUNSHI, *Living Zoroastrianism. Urban Parsis Speak about their Religion*—Richmond, Surrey: Curzon 2001, 344 p., ISBN 0-7007-1328-X (cloth) £45.00.

The international media recently focused a certain amount of interest on the Parsis (= Zoroastrians) of India since both their number and that of the vultures required for the effectuation of their unique mode of disposal of the dead has seen a sharp decline. At the same time, the academic study of the Parsis has witnessed an astonishing resurgence. For many years, not much substantial work had been done after the classic and still unsurpassed study by the German sociologist Eckehard Kulke (*The Parsees in India. A Minority as Agent of Social Change*, 1974 with several reprints in India) and a good number of important essays by John Hinnells, published over the years since 1978, some of which are now conveniently assembled in his "selected works" (*Zoroastrian and Parsi Studies*, 2000). Moreover, as a supervisor, Hinnells has some further studies to his credit. Some of these dissertations, unfortunately, have never been formally published and are not accessible to other scholars.

Both Kulke and Hinnells have mostly worked on the colonial and post-colonial periods. The post-colonial predicament of the Parsi community has recently been discussed (in a for many Parsis rather provocative manner) by the anthropologist Tanya Luhrman in the light of post-colonial theories (*The Good Parsi. The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society*, 1996). One year later, an interesting dissertation on the pre- and early colonial periods has finally seen the light of the day (Susan Stiles Maneck, *The Death of Ahriman: Culture, Identity and Theological Change among the Parsis of India*, 1997).

In both books, the issue of 'identity' is dealt with in very different ways, and now a third author, Jesse S. Palsetia, himself a Parsi, has devoted one more volume to that topic. While Palsetia goes beyond that period in his introduction and epilogue, he basically deals with the 'golden age' of the Parsis, from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries, a period also

favoured by the indigenous Parsi historiography (e.g. *The Parsis in Western India: 1818 to 1920*, ed. by Nawaz B. Mody, 1998). In the six main chapters of his book which is based on his doctoral thesis submitted at the University of Toronto (Centre for South Asian Studies/Indian History), Palsetia tackles the issue of 'identity' from six angles which at the same time are intimately linked to each other and show a chronological development: "Identity and the Urban Setting" (about the migration to Bombay and the construction of mechanisms of moral and material support), "Identity and the Institution" (about the creation and transformation of the 'apex-body', the Bombay Parsi Punchayet), "The Challenge to Identity" (about conversions of a couple of Parsi boys to Christianity as a result of missionary activities, and the reactions to these conversions by the Parsis), "Identity and Social Reform" (about modern education, religious reform, and the growth of a public opinion among the Parsis), "Identity and the Law" (about the establishment of separate Parsi laws and law courts, and some important cases concerning intermarriage and conversion), and finally "Identity and Political Nationalism" (about the involvement of Parsis in the Indian nationalistic movement leading to Independence).

Palsetia has produced a solid, well-informed, balanced, and highly readable, albeit somewhat lengthy and occasionally stiff historical account. He is familiar with most (if not all) relevant scholarly contributions and presents some interesting materials. The weakest section of the book is the chapter on the early religious reform movement among the Parsis. Here, his chronology gets somewhat confused, and his account is not based on contemporary source-materials. Repeatedly, Palsetia ascribes the Parsis an ability to adapt, to innovate, and to exploit opportunity. While that may be true for much of the period he is dealing with, one wonders why this ability (which is presented almost as an inborn quality) later on got lost—and it obviously did so to a certain extent, judging from the later history of the Parsis. The basic problem of the book, however, is his overall perspective: what he calls "preservation of identity" (see also the subtitle to the book). Unfortunately, Palsetia has not gone deep into the debate on the concept of (collective) 'identity' to any degree. Repeatedly, his focus on the "preservation of identity" seems to put things in a somewhat arbitrary light. Where this reviewer would see struggles for power, authority, and success, Palsetia simply observes the efforts to "preserve" (rather than to invent, challenge, or modify) 'identity.' Is it too far-fetched to assume that the writing of the dissertation (and subsequent book)

had much to do with the author, a 'diaspora' Parsi from Canada, wishing to 'preserve' (or rather understand and construct) his own identity?

This would of course be a very legitimate ambition and be a long way from the Orientalist, hegemonial fashion of pre-scribing other peoples' identities. This has been (and still is) very much a problem with any presentation of other peoples' religions. For the study of Zoroastrianism, probably the first programmatic attempt out of that dilemma has now been put forward by the Iranologist Philip G. Kreyenbroek. In order to avoid what he calls the "traditional, deductive or prescriptive method of research, which accepts an authoritative form of a religion as a norm in the light of which other forms or aspects of the faith can be understood" (p. ix), which to him seems problematic in the case of the modern Parsis—as a matter of fact, it seems problematic in most other cases as well, including pre-modern Zoroastrianism—, Kreyenbroek proposes as an alternative "an inductive, descriptive approach" (*ibid.*). This consists of interviews, conducted by a Parsi lady, Shehnaz Neville Munshi, mostly with elderly lay Parsis in Bombay. These interviews were arranged with the aim "to allow people to discuss those aspects of religion that were closest to their heart and to express their personal understanding of their faith" (p. x). Therefore, apart from an introduction giving a survey of "classical Zoroastrianism," "common Parsi observances" (i.e. rituals and ceremonies), and a brief sketch of the Parsis in India, 30 interviews form the main part of the book (pp. 61–290). The interviewees are divided into six groups: "traditionalists" (9 interviews), "neo-traditionalists" (4), "modernist views" (5), "eclecticism in religious views" (4), "esoteric beliefs" (5), and "religion as cultural heritage" (3). In the third part, Kreyenbroek attempts to draw some conclusions, sketching "Parsi religion in the light of the interviews." Here, he distinguishes between "a non-reasoning faith in prayer and observance," what he calls the 'faith paradigm,' and "various attempts to rediscover the true teachings of Zoroastrianism," what he calls the 'belief paradigm' (p. 293). Moreover, he found differences between attitudes to religious authority and personal judgement in religious matters. It is strange, indeed, to observe many Parsis asserting that all religions are equally valid, "no such acceptance of religious pluriformity informs their views on Zoroastrianism" (p. 314), resulting in intense debates among the different sections in the community.

Kreyenbroek's book is a major, and highly innovative contribution to the study of Zoroastrianism. Kreyenbroek's method may seem ingenious, but it

is a pity that he did not venture to study alternative methodologies that are long established in ethnology and social research. While Kreyenbroek is to be applauded for his attempt to avoid the trap of Orientalist discourse and ethnocentric views of religion, his quest for authenticity and 'innocence' is seriously limited through the person of the interviewer who is key-figure in a neo-traditionalist movement inspired by Western scholarship, and her specific religious ideology to a certain extent does inform and shape the course of the interviews. In order to broaden the picture, possibly he should have worked with several interviewers from different religious backgrounds. At least, an interview with the interviewer should have been included in order to clarify her own religious experiences and her own view of religion. Hopefully, the remaining interviews done as part of the project, mostly with Parsis from rural areas and priests, will soon be published in one form or the other.

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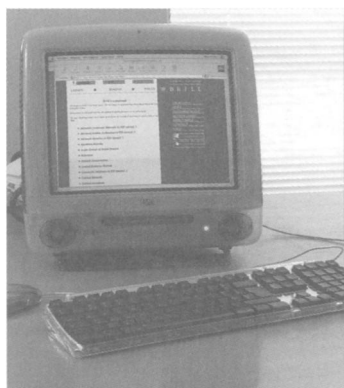
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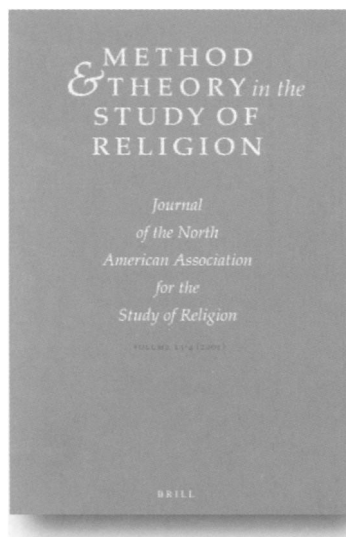
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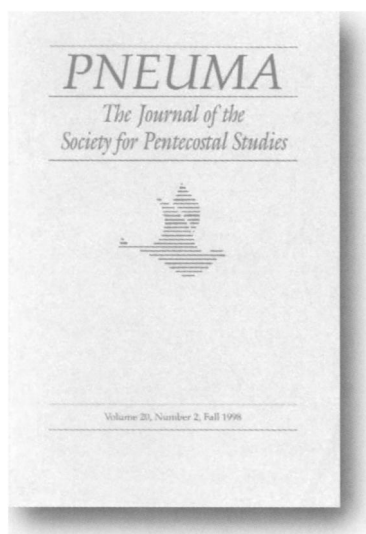
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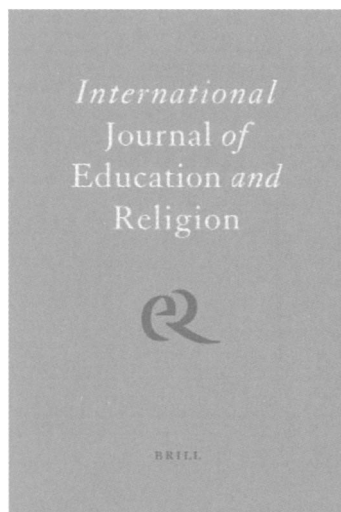
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SANCTUARIES, SACRIFICES, AND THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

NANCY A. EVANS

Summary

Modern scholars studying Eleusis have consistently made some assumptions about the sanctuary and the famous rites that took place there throughout antiquity. Although we have no evidence for altars within the sanctuary walls, archaeologists continue to produce plans with altars in the courtyard before the temple, while historians of religion propose narratives for the Mysteries that feature scenes of animal sacrifice. While precise details of the famous nocturnal *teletai* may remain unknown to us, we can infer other significant details about the festival from the evidence that we do have. This essay argues that the type of animal sacrifice known as *thusia* that regularly took place at public altars in ancient Greece was deliberately excluded from the interior of the sanctuary at Eleusis. Beginning with a review of the development of the sanctuary, the essay focuses on the Anaktoron and Telesterion, and then turns to important features that were consistently located outside the sanctuary walls. Objects were dedicated both within the sanctuary walls and outside them. The analysis of the locations where the dedications were made suggests that mediation with the divine during the nocturnal *teletai* was not accomplished by priests officiating over animal sacrifices. Altars were absent from the interior of the sanctuary because the Mysteries entailed a more egalitarian experience of the gods than did the traditional customs of *thusia*.

Introduction

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* when Demeter has revealed her true identity to Queen Metaneira and the other inhabitants of the city of Eleusis, she instructs the Eleusinians to propitiate her anger by building her “a temple and an altar below it” (*Hymn* line 270). The goddess’ instructions appear at first to be quite simple, and scholars studying the Eleusinian Mysteries and the long history of Demeter’s sanctuary in Eleusis have used these instructions to help them reconstruct a comprehensive picture of the site and the rites that took place there. For

modern scholars the poem supplements fragmentary physical evidence and silences of literary testimonia.¹ Archaeologists in the twentieth century customarily produced plans and sketches that include altars in the courtyard at the entrance to Demeter's temple.² Historians of religion, perhaps following the archaeologists' lead, likewise proposed narrative accounts of the Mysteries that feature prominent scenes of animal sacrifice.³ Both groups of scholars clearly assumed that the nocturnal celebration of the Mysteries included animal sacrifice.

This essay will argue that the type of animal sacrifice known as *thusia* that regularly took place at altars in ancient Greece was deliberately excluded from the interior of the sanctuary at Eleusis. Although precise details of the famous nocturnal rites, or *teletai*, may always remain unknown to us, we can infer other significant details about the cult, its practices and its theology from the evidence that we do have. In particular, this essay will examine the various places where dedications to the gods were made. I will begin with a review of the development of the sanctuary, focusing first on the Anaktoron and Telesterion and then turning to important features that were consistently located outside the sanctuary walls. Objects were dedicated in both places, both within the sanctuary walls and outside them, but altars appear to be uniformly located outside the sanctuary walls. The analysis of the locations where objects were dedicated suggests that significant theological and ideological reasons lie behind the absence of altars and animal sacrifice

¹ See for instance Pausanias 1.38.6: "Here is shown what is called the threshing floor of Triptolemos and the altar. But my dream forbade me to describe what is within the wall of the sanctuary; surely it is clear that the uninitiated may not lawfully hear of that from the sight of which they are disbarred."

² See figure 1, a drawing done by Travlos that situates altars in front of the temple, here reproduced from Mylonas 1961 figure 25. Similar images by Travlos also appear in Vanderpool 1982 plate 29 (a photograph of a scale model of the classical sanctuary, built by Travlos, that includes altars directly in front of the temple), and Kokkou-Vyride 1999 map 7, the same drawing by Travlos that depicts the Peisistratæan sanctuary with altars. This drawing was originally published in Travlos 1951:12.

³ One of the most imaginative narrative accounts of the Mysteries comes from Burkert 1983, discussed below.



Figure 1. Restored view of the sanctuary of Eleusis during the Peisistratenean period. There is no evidence for the altars in this courtyard. Reproduced from Mylonas 1961, figure 25.

within the sanctuary. Altars represent, among other things, the locus for a common and significant type of mediation with the gods which simultaneously places those with political power in the cultic center, and those with less power at the margins. If altars were absent from the interior of the sanctuary, then the *teletai* in the Telesterion were experienced in a more egalitarian way by those who chose to participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

*Development of the Sanctuary: A Review*⁴

In antiquity Eleusis was a deme within the city-state of Attica, a prosperous and well-fortified harbor town on the bay of Salamis about 14 miles northwest of the city of Athens on the frontier of Attica and Megara. The Mysteries at Eleusis were an annual festival to Demeter held during the middle of the month of Boedromion, approximately corresponding to our late September/early October. This festival known as the “Greater Mysteries” became pan-Hellenic, or open to Greeks from city-states other than Attica, long before the Classical period. During the fifth and fourth centuries BCE the Eleusinian Mysteries quickly assumed the status of the most important and widely-attended mystery cult in the Greek-speaking world, a status it maintained and even enlarged upon throughout antiquity until the

⁴ Travlos 1988:99–102 provides a full bibliography for the years 1864–1985. The basic handbook offering an overview of the Mysteries and the excavations at Eleusis remains Mylonas 1961. The earlier work of Noack 1927 also remains indispensable for a thorough study of the sanctuary and its history. Richardson 1974:249–250 (Appendix I, “Eleusinian Topography”) discusses Noack and Mylonas in some detail, noting significant differences and including some new insights. The following overview of the development of the sanctuary updates the older study of Mylonas by incorporating some of the more recent research. More recent and specialized studies of Eleusinian archaeology include Darque 1981, Ziro 1991, and Kokkou-Vyride 1999. Kevin Clinton has published many fine studies on Eleusis: for this essay I have used in particular Clinton 1974, 1988, 1992, 1993 and 1996. Clinton 1988 used literary and epigraphical evidence to argue that the altars of Demeter and Kore were located in the “forecourt” of the sanctuary. To my knowledge this observation has thus far provoked little discussion among scholars of Eleusis. Foley 1994 also discusses the site and the cult in the context of her study of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

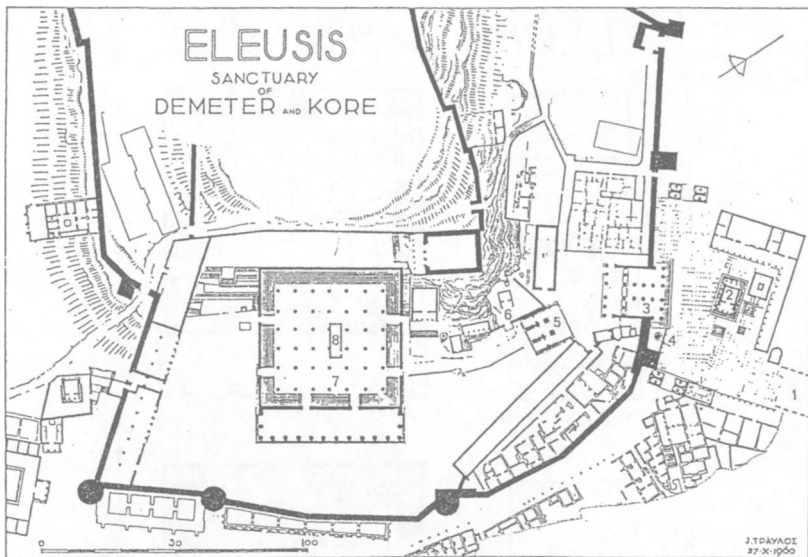


Figure 2. The Eleusinian sanctuary in the second century C.E. 1. Sacred Way. 2. Temple of Artemis with altars in courtyard. 3. Greater Propylaea. 4. Kallichoron Well. 5. Lesser Propylaea. 6. Mirthless Rock. 7. Periklean Telesterion. 8. Periklean Anaktoron. Note that the altars and the well (2, 4) are both outside the Greater Propylaea (3). Reproduced from Clinton 1993:111.

emperor Theodosius issued edicts against mystery cults in the late fourth century CE. By the end of the fifth century Christians had destroyed the sanctuary.

The sanctuary lay on the southeast slope of a hill overlooking the bay of Salamis, and it developed in a particular way that points to the central significance of a small building commonly called the Anaktoron.⁵ During the geometric period a marked increase in building ac-

⁵ The centrality of the Anaktoron was first suggested by Kuruniotis 1935 and furthered by his students Mylonas and Travlos. See Mylonas 1961 *passim*, and figures 3 and 4, schematic plans of the Telesterion and Anaktoron adapted from Travlos 1951:13, here reproduced from Mylonas 1961 figure 26. Clinton 1982:126–127 and Clinton 1993:120 refer to both the Anaktoron and Telesterion as the “Anaktoron.” Darque 1981 established that there is insufficient literary or archaeological

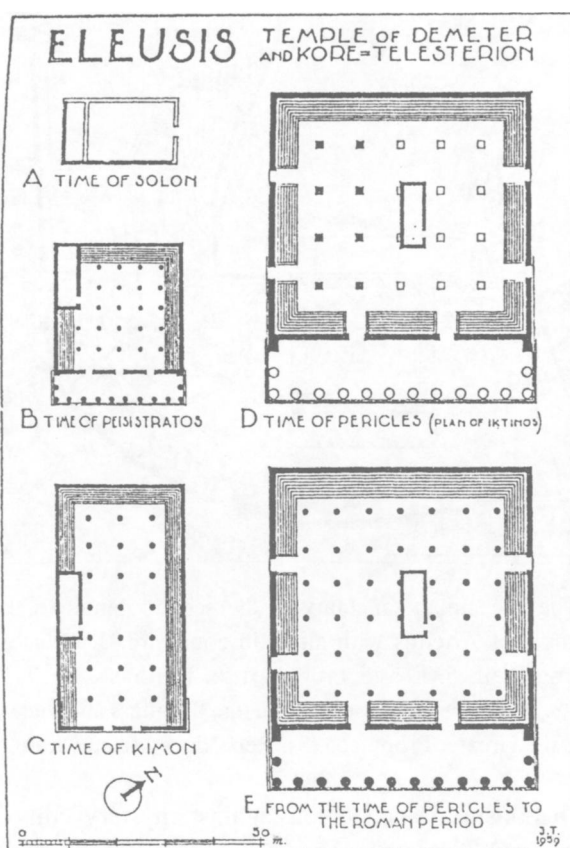


Figure 3. The development of the Eleusinian Anaktoron and Telesterion. Reproduced from Mylonas 1961, figure 26.

evidence for cultic continuity between the 14th century BCE structures discovered by Kourouniotes in the 1920s and the structures and objects from the 8th and 7th centuries. As Kuruniotis 1935:77 and Kourouniotes 1936:12–14 had done, Mylonas wanted to connect Mycenaean remains to cult practices in the historical period, but did not have the evidence to do so, although Mylonas 1961:34 does state with confidence that the Mycenaean “Megaron B” is the Temple of Demeter mentioned in the *Hymn to Demeter*. Mylonas’ argument for Mycenaean background has considerable length (Mylonas 1961:38–54), but is, as Darque 1981 conclusively proves, mistaken. Mylonas 1961:273 reveals the motivation for his desire to establish continuity between

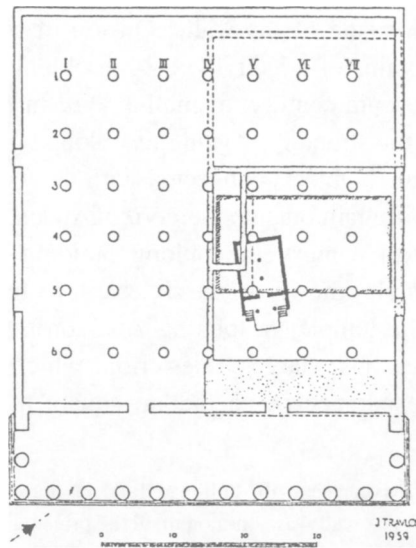


Figure 4. Plan showing the relative position of the Anaktoron and Telesterion. Reproduced from Mylonas 1961, figure 27.

tivity and votive remains at the site indicate a shift in behavior that is consonant with other sites around the Greek world, and is evidence for an increased economic and social stability in this region of the Aegean.⁶ The earliest verifiable sanctuary at the site is a small eighth century temple built on a man-made terrace and surrounded by a *peribolos* wall.⁷ Evidence for sacrificial pyres has been found on and

the Classical and Mycenaean periods: he speculates that the *hiera* shown at the climax of the Mysteries were relics handed down from Mycenaean times and stored for centuries in the Anaktoron. Here Mylonas and Kourouniotes were evidently following the lead of Martin Nilsson who also saw possible Mycenaean roots for this Demeter cult: Nilsson 1932:161.

⁶ See Polignac 1995 for his argument about the formation of the Greek city-state and the significance of extraurban cult centers in Greece during the eighth century. Polignac 1995:22 classifies the Demeter sanctuary at Eleusis as extraurban.

⁷ Mylonas 1961:57–58 cites the fragment of an elliptical wall excavated by Philios and later examined more thoroughly by Kourouniotes. The wall is not as fragmentary as Richardson 1974:328 implies; it is 5 m in length, and built atop an artificial

around the exterior side of the wall.⁸ On top of this eighth century temple lie the remains of a later 14×24 m oblong building that can be dated to the seventh century; a small 3×12 m room occupies the southwest end of the structure. Again this oblong building is protected by a *peribolos* wall.⁹ Objects connected with the worship of Demeter were found nearby, again outside the *peribolos* wall.¹⁰

During the sixth century the oblong building is replaced by a larger, roofed temple known as the Telesterion. In each subsequent enlargement of the temple the oblong Anaktoron remains the focal point of the increasingly larger Telesterion, which over time begins to assume the appearance of an indoor, square theater.¹¹ The sixth

terrace comprised of Mycenaean fill. Polignac 1995:19 notes that the construction of the terrace and *temenos* wall was common to all the principal extraurban centers of worship in the eighth century, including Delphi, Eleusis and Delos.

⁸ Mylonas 1961:57: "strong traces of fire and smoke still to be seen on the outer face of the retaining wall prove definitely that in this area . . . sacrifices were held over a long period of time, certainly in honor of Demeter and Kore." The sacrificial pyres at Eleusis have been analyzed in great detail by Kokkou-Vyride 1999. The fact that evidence for burning is on the exterior of the wall will be key for my argument below.

⁹ Mylonas 1961:67–69 calls this 14×24 m building the Archaic Telesterion. Mylonas postulates that the Anaktoron was located along the southwest side of the building based on the observations and calculations of Travlos: Mylonas 1961:69–70.

¹⁰ Objects found are mostly pottery dishes and other small votive offerings often in the shape of a female figure. For a complete catalogue of finds from the pyres on the exterior of the walls see the photographs in the appendix of Kokkou-Vyride 1999, plates 7–62. The items catalogued in this appendix include many sorts of vases (both full scale and miniature), clay plaques, and metal artifacts.

¹¹ Most archaeologists today call the larger, theater space the "Telesterion," and the smaller oblong interior building the "Anaktoron." Mylonas 1961:69 and 84 cites Travlos' observations about the overlapping layers of buildings, and suggests that ancient architects made an effort in each successive enlargement and renovation to preserve the site of Demeter's original visit to Eleusis, the structure that Kourouniotes, Travlos and Mylonas claimed was the Mycenaean shrine. Travlos published new drawings for Mylonas 1961, including figures 4, 6, 26 and 27. I agree that architects made the effort to keep the early Anaktoron the focus of the temple, but with Darque I agree that the earliest Demeter sanctuary is a simple geometric structure dated to the eighth century.

century Telesterion is a square, 25×27 m, roofed building that fully encloses the older 3×12 m structure in its northwest corner.¹² Inside this archaic Telesterion graduated steps rise up three of the four sides, offering a view of the interior Anaktoron and an open space around it. This archaic Telesterion was enlarged once more in the sixth century, and had probably been dismantled in preparation for yet another enlargement of the sanctuary when the Persians invaded Attica in 480/479 BCE.¹³ The middle of the fifth century, the Periclean period famous in Athenian history for major building projects on the Athenian Acropolis, sees the immediate construction of a new and improved, larger Telesterion (51×51 m). The completed fifth century structure is four times larger than its Peisistratean predecessor and includes seating for several thousand spectators on the eight rising steps that now surround all four walls.¹⁴ At this stage of the temple's design the Anaktoron occupies a large, open space in the center of the Telesterion.¹⁵

The Telesterion was called Demeter's Temple, *neos*, and was like all Greek temples located within a defined sacred precinct, or *temenos*,

¹² Mylonas 1961:78–105; Mylonas 1961 figure 26, plan B = figure 3 in this article.

¹³ Herodotus 9.13–14 and 9.65 attest to the destruction of the Eleusinian sanctuary. As T. Leslie Shear, Jr. 1982 has shown, this destruction is supported both by a fifth century Attic inscription, *IG I² 81* (an inscription from 421/420 that records the construction of a bridge over the Rheitoi using stones from the Archaic Telesterion that had been dismantled before the Persian War), and by the evidence of a rebuilt wall. See Mylonas 1961:106–107 and figure 26 plan E = figure 3 here. Shear 1982 also cites two other inscriptions from 408 and 407 that account for building material taken down from the archaic Telesterion and later reused: *IG I² 313* lines 103–110 and *IG I² 314* lines 113–120.

¹⁴ Clinton 1996 calls the Telesterion the largest public building in fifth century Attica.

¹⁵ It is this fifth-century Telesterion that I will be focusing on in this paper, although it is important to note that the surrounding sanctuary continued to be elaborated and renovated in both the Hellenistic and Roman periods as interest in the mysteries grew, while the Telesterion and sanctuary itself remain this same size.

separate from the inhabited territory outside.¹⁶ Only worshippers of Demeter's mysteries, called initiates or *mystai*, were allowed beyond the gates that led into the goddess' sacred precinct which included the Telesterion and the paved courtyard around it. Outside the sanctuary was a public courtyard containing less sacred sites: a Roman period temple to Artemis Propylaia (Artemis of the Portals), several older altars, including the ground altars or *escharai*, and the Kallichoron Well, known from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* to be associated with the myth of Demeter's wanderings to Eleusis after Hades abducted her daughter.¹⁷

Constant Features in Sanctuary Design

While the evidence from the different building periods over several centuries indicates the steady and substantial growth of the sanctuary, a certain spatial relationship between different elements of the sanctuary remains constant throughout each period of design and renovation. The goddess' temple is always situated on a monumental raised terrace and encircled by *peribolos* walls; the public courtyard with the altars and the Kallichoron Well always lie below the temple and outside the walls of the sanctuary.

Ancient architects took pains to maintain this separation of temple and altars. Beginning in the archaic period, each renovation and enlargement of the Telesterion also required expanding the courtyard and pushing back the *peribolos* walls that encircled the Telesterion and hid it from the outside world. The most significant enlargements

¹⁶ On the Telesterion-Anaktoron complex as a *neos*, see *IG* I² 81:8, *IG* I² 313:103; Mylonas 1961:40; Richardson 1974:328. On the significance of marking out sacred space and the emergence of the sanctuary in the archaic period see Polignac 1995:20.

¹⁷ See Mylonas 1961:169–70 for his suggestion that the Roman period orientation of the gates and the altars implies possible earlier structures. See Mylonas 1961:60 for a discussion of the traces of a much earlier apsidal building discovered by Kourouniotes, and identified by him as a possible late Geometric temple of Artemis Proylaia. The *eschara* or ground altar is simply a pit in the ground ringed by stone. This sort of altar is older than the raised stone *bomos*. The oldest altar we currently can identify in Greece is an *eschara* in a Hera sanctuary on Samos; see Polignac 1995:17.

to the Telesterion, the courtyard and the sanctuary were made in the sixth and fifth centuries. Under Peisistratos in the late sixth century new *peribolos* walls were built further to the east so that the new and much larger Telesterion could be built on a previously existing archaic terrace. Since the new walls cut across the older public courtyard that contained the archaic Kallichoron Well, moving the walls meant that architects also had to fill in the archaic well and build one further to the east, and also rebuild the courtyard surrounding the well so that both well and courtyard would remain outside the new walls.¹⁸ At this same time Peisistratean architects also reoriented the main entrance to the sanctuary, moving it from the south, the side facing the sea, to the northeast.¹⁹ This north gate marked the threshold between the goddess' sanctuary and the Sacred Way (the main road to Athens) and was later rebuilt by the Romans on a monumental scale.²⁰

The next major renovation came when the Athenians resumed enlarging the Eleusinian sanctuary early in the fifth century after the Persians destroyed the Anaktoron. They first repaired and strengthened the area where the Persian army had breached the *peribolos* wall.²¹ They then filled in an area between the archaic terrace and an older *peribolos* wall, thus transforming the older *peribolos* wall into a retaining wall that could now support a much larger terrace, with its interior courtyard and even larger Telesterion. Finally they surrounded the new retaining wall with yet another, better fortified *peribolos* wall.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the curious design of the *peribolos* walls and how their course accommodates the well see Ziro 1991:292. For discussion of this retaining wall see Mylonas 1961:91. See Mylonas 1961:44–47, 72, and 97–99, 170 for his scattered discussions of the history of the well.

¹⁹ See Ziro 1991:291 on the north gate. His study underplays the cultic significance of the walls and the exterior location of the well and courtyard, instead emphasizing that Peisistratos transformed the sanctuary into a defensible “fortress of vital importance for the security of Attica.”

²⁰ Labeled “5. Lesser Propylaea” in figure 2.

²¹ See Shear 1982:133–134 on the breached wall southeast of the Telesterion and the burning of the Anaktoron in 480, followed by the rebuilding and refortification of the sanctuary.

This construction of a new outer wall required the construction of a new outer north gate.²² The new *peribolos* wall and gate were pushed as far east as they could be extended, while still leaving the well (already moved once before) and the outer-most courtyard open to the public. These fifth-century renovations mark the final stage in the history of enlargements to the sanctuary itself, and they ensured that the sites outside the outermost *peribolos* wall of the sanctuary (the altars, the Kallichoron Well and the courtyard around it) remained accessible to the general public, to both initiate and to non-initiate alike.

This arrangement—an elevated temple enclosed behind heavily fortified walls in a restricted location, while the Kallichoron Well and altars stay at a distance below in a public space—was maintained through each enlargement of the temple and courtyards. There is no material evidence for altars within the sanctuary behind the walls for any period during the history of the sanctuary. Altar bases and the charred remains of pyres and ground-altars are uniformly found in the outermost courtyard, outside the walls in the public space accessible to both *mystai* and non-initiates. Literary sources also mention altars outside the sanctuary. For example in Euripides *Suppliant Women* the actors and chorus members are sitting at the altars of Demeter and Kore.²³ They mention that they can see the roof of the Telesterion above them in the background and they also tell us that they are

²² Labeled “3. Greater Propylaea” in figure 2. See Ziro 1991:292 on the new walls and the Greater Propylaea, which he terms the “North Pylon.” Ziro asserts that the outer fifth century walls, like the Peisistratean ones, were “strictly defensive in character.” They were 1.75 m thick, and he dates their construction to 490–480. According to Ziro 1991:293–294 the walls continued to be fortified even into the fourth century, when they were thickened to 3.8 m. Even after all the later fortifications of the wall architects made sure that the Kallichoron Well remained on the outside of the *temenos*.

²³ Euripides *Suppliant Women* 33, 64, 93, 268 and 290. Euripides refers to the altars of Demeter and Kore using three terms: *eschara*, *bomos*, and *thumele*.

seated in immediate view of the Kallichoron Well.²⁴ Since it would be impossible for a playwright to represent the interior of the sanctuary on stage for an audience that contained non-initiates, the women at the well and the altars must be in the outer-most courtyard.²⁵ This literary evidence clearly fits well with the archaeological evidence for the Kallichoron Well and the ground altars and pyres outside the *peribolos* walls.

The Eleusinian Festival: Thusia and Other Offerings

The requirements of the varied traditional practices necessitated both public and non-public sacred spaces at Eleusis, with altars located in the public and less restricted locations. The annual celebration of Demeter's rites was spread out over eight days in two widely separated locales. The festival moved first from Eleusis to the heart of Athens, then to the innermost recesses of the Telesterion, and then back towards the center in Athens. Different types of offerings were made in particular places at specified times during the festival. Many of the activities and purifications associated with the Greater Mysteries of Demeter actually happened in Athens itself, starting on the 14th day of the month Boedromion with the transfer of the *hierá*, or sacred objects, from the sanctuary in Eleusis to the Eleusinion sanctuary on the edge of the Athenian agora.²⁶ The next four days were passed

²⁴ Euripides *Suppliant Women* 88 and 980–989 describe the setting with the temple in the background; *Suppliant Women* 391 and 619 describe the setting with the well in view.

²⁵ Richardson 1974:249 cites this scene from the *Suppliant Women* as evidence for altars within the sanctuary. See Clinton 1988 for a discussion of the play similar to my own. Consider also the Pausanias quotation in note 1 above: clearly the altar Pausanias describes is in the public space accessible to non-initiates. Of course, if there had been altars within the sanctuary, we would not necessarily learn of them from the extant literary sources.

²⁶ The Greater Mysteries in September were preceded (or perhaps followed) by the Lesser Mysteries, celebrated in Athens in early spring during the month of Anthesterion. The following outline of the festival calendar is adapted from Mylonas 1961, Clinton 1988:69–71, Clinton 1993:116, and Parke 1977:55–72. Parke covers

in the heart of Athens itself; on these days priests performed *thusia* and purifications.²⁷ These preliminaries also included the official declarations of the Archon Basileus. The Archon stood on the porch of the Stoa Poikile in the heart of the Athenian agora, and declared that anyone who could speak Greek and was free of the pollution of murder was invited to take part in Demeter's rites.

The 19th of Boedromion marked the great procession from Athens to Eleusis, a 14 mile pilgrimage during which the priests, priestesses, magistrates and the ephebes accompanied the *hiera* and led the *mystai* along the Sacred Way.²⁸ The prospective initiates spent the first full day in Eleusis, the 20th, preparing for the nocturnal *teletai* by fasting and perhaps visiting the Kallichoron Well in the public space outside the sanctuary; meanwhile priests made a great offering of meal to Demeter called the *pelanos*.²⁹ On the night of the 20th the *mystai* passed through the gates and interior courtyards, and entered the Telesterion where the *teletai* took place, the holy *mysteria* we still know so little about.³⁰ The last day of the festival featured public rites and libations in honor of the dead, including rites that incorporated

the logistics of the festival, calling on testimonia that do not appear in Mylonas and Clinton. For the role of the Athenian Eleusinion in the annual Mysteries see Miles 1998:21–23.

²⁷ For altars in the Athenian Eleusinion in the classical period see Miles 1998:62–63, and plate 34 with photographs of these altar bases.

²⁸ Clinton 1988:70 argues that the pilgrimage of the initiates happened a day later, on the 20th Boedromion, separate from the official pompe. Clinton's reckoning for the whole festival is one day shorter than the one typically proposed; our evidence for the scheduling of each day of the festival is especially unclear. Even Parke 1977 is ambiguous: on 69 he says day 6 (the 20th) is the final day leading up to the initiation; on 71 he claims that the initiation happened on the night between days 7 and 8.

²⁹ By fasting and visiting the well the initiates were imitating Demeter's behavior at Eleusis, as depicted in the *Hymn to Demeter*. For the *pelanos* sacrifice see Parke 1977:69; Mylonas 1961:260.

³⁰ Again the schema in Clinton 1988 differs from the typical one; he claims the Mysteries are held on only one night (the 21st Boedromion) instead of two (the 20th and 21st), as seen in e.g. Mylonas 1961:258 and 278.

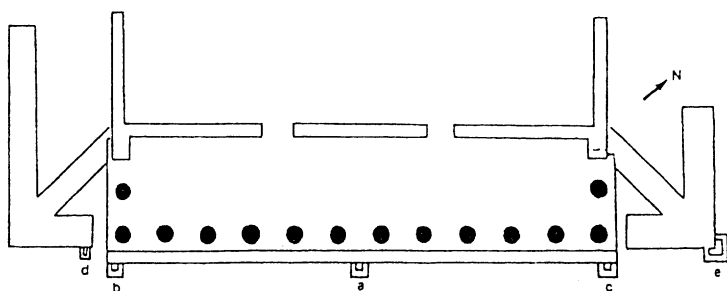


Figure 5. The porch of the Telesterion, including the *megara* for depositing piglets (a–e). Reproduced from Clinton 1988:74.

the unique Eleusinian vessels called *kernoi* and *plemochoai*,³¹ and finally the great civic sacrifices at the altars and *escharai* in the public courtyard outside the walls. Celebrations and joyous dancing followed, and this portion of the festival was open to non-initiates and initiates alike, although perhaps only the initiates could fully know the cause for the celebration. In contrast to the procession to Eleusis on the 19th which had been a grand, organized affair, the return trip on the 23rd had no ritualized function. The *hiera* remained in the innermost sanctuary in Eleusis until the following year. Participants were then free to go their individual ways as they returned to their normal, daily lives.

Although altars and pyres have not been found within the interior of the sanctuary, the design of the Telesterion has an interesting feature did that allow for dedication of a different type of animal offering. Five pits identified as *megara* have been found attached to the front southeast side of the Telesterion portico. These pits are impressively

³¹ Among the pottery finds at Eleusis are offering vessels called *kernoi*, unusual earthenware serving pieces characteristic of Eleusis. Some are also made of marble. Numerous little cups for cereal offerings (grain, peas etc.) and liquid offerings (oil, honey, wine) are attached to the *kernos*, and the *kernos* was carried tied on the head. For descriptions and images of *kernoi* see Mylonas 1961:221–2 and figure 87. Many *kernoi* were also found in the Athenian Eleusinion; Miles 1998:95–103 argues that the specialized *kernoi* vessels were also known as *plemochoai*, and were used on the final day of the festival to make offerings to the god of the dead. See Miles 1998 plates 18–19 for more images.

deep; one is over 20 m deep. A recent review of the original excavation reports from the discovery of these pits in the 1880s revealed that excavators had discovered a fertile soil with the consistency of compost that contained animal bones.³² This evidence points to the women's festival of Demeter Thesmophoria celebrated during the following month, a festival common in archaic and classical Greece which required citizen wives to offer whole piglets to the goddess, placing them in the ground to rot.³³ Although we cannot with certainty link any compost of decayed piglets with the celebration of the Mysteries (initiates were forbidden from recounting what happened within the sanctuary walls), scholars have long known of the significance of piglets at Eleusis from literary evidence and the iconography of the Mysteries.³⁴ Eleusis was famous for its piggies, and initiates even commissioned commemorative statues depicting themselves holding a piglet in a posture that recalls that moment before dedication of their offering to Demeter.

Since we know from epigraphic and iconographic evidence that pigs play a large role in Eleusinian ritual, it is then not surprising to find specific areas for the deposition of votive pig offerings for the goddess to whom pigs were so often dedicated in Greek cult practices. Furthermore, the rediscovery and analysis of the *megara* has the potential to solve several problems in our understanding of the sanctuary and its design. Before this rediscovery scholars struggled to find space or even evidence for altars near the temple or anywhere on the temple platform

³² Clinton 1988:73, 76; photographs and illustrations of the *megara* can be found on 74 and 75. See figure 5.

³³ Clinton 1988:77–78 argues that what was thrown down into the *megara* at the Mysteries was brought up at the Thesmophoria. For further connections between the rites at Eleusis and the Thesmophoria, see Brumfield 1981. See Miles 1998:22 where she suggests that the city Eleusinion in Athens probably served as a site for the celebration of the Thesmophoria.

³⁴ Mylonas 1961:223 cites pigs on Eleusinian coins; Mylonas 1961:201 and 203 discuss statues (and statuettes) of pigs and of initiates holding pigs. See Mylonas 1961 figure 66 for a lovely example of a pig statuette.

where *thusia* could have taken place. Mylonas identified several “possible” areas for altars on the terrace (e.g. the interior court just south of the archaic Telesterion, and another south courtyard constructed in the classical period), but he had no evidence.³⁵ Kourouniotes was especially interested in establishing a Mycenaean pre-history for Eleusis, and this pre-history also included altars in the sanctuary’s interior courtyard.³⁶ Noack before him argued that altars were a “consistent” feature of the sanctuary, but later archaeologists showed that he had conflated evidence from different levels and periods.³⁷ The architect John Travlos, who worked alongside Kourouniotes and Mylonas, in one drawing even places two altars on the south-east terrace before the Telesterion portico.³⁸ Versions of this Travlos drawing are often reprinted, most recently in 1999, but he too had no evidence for this placement, only the apparent desire to depict an altar in front of a temple. Vanderpool suggested that the interior courtyard was the “sacred threshing floor” known to us from a fourth century inscription, but this suggestion also required the removal of the altars that Travlos’ drawings and models had placed there.³⁹ Finally, Burkert has speculated about the “possibilities” for sacrifice, admittedly without any physical evidence, only comparative evidence from other cult practices, especially the standard cult practices of *thusia*, bloody sacrifice. His most imaginative reconstruction can be found in *Homo Necans*, where he speculates that the climax of the mysteries entailed the sacrifice of a

³⁵ Mylonas 1961:91: “... a triangularly shaped court where the altars of the Goddesses *must* have stood” (emphasis mine—Mylonas knows he has no evidence for this altar); Mylonas 1961:137: “... rock cuttings indicating *perhaps* the position of an altar” (emphasis mine).

³⁶ Kourouniotes 1936:63: “Within the court [inside the sanctuary] the two altars of the goddesses *must* have stood, but the exact location is unknown” (emphasis mine). See also Kuruniotis 1935:68, a discussion of the smaller interior courtyard that was “der eigentliche Tempelhof” where we must “assume” (“als sicher annehmen”) that the altars stood.

³⁷ Noack 1927:10; Mylonas 1961:57.

³⁸ Mylonas 1961 figure 25 = Travlos 1951:12 = figure 2 above.

³⁹ Vanderpool 1982:173.

castrated sheep whose testicles were offered to the goddess. There is absolutely no basis in the iconographic, architectural, archaeological, literary or epigraphic evidence for this conclusion.⁴⁰

Nocturnal Teletai and the Absence of Thusia: a Proposal

Clearly the celebration of the Mysteries did include conventional sacrificial rites. The Mysteries lasted for over a week, and included many occasions for *thusia*, both in Athens and in Eleusis. Altar bases have been identified in both locations. The frequency and dual locations of these animal sacrifices could have confirmed the social and political bonds between Eleusis and Athens since the sequence of traditional rites required Athenian and Eleusinian officials to come together, travel together and perform *thusia* together. A special priest was even identified to oversee all of the sacrifices: the *hiereus epi bomo*.⁴¹ But I propose, contrary to the archaeologists and architects who studied the site in the last century, that altars were absent from the interior of the sanctuary, and that the initiates communicated with gods in a different fashion.

Unique sanctuary features imply that the nocturnal *teletai* within the Eleusinian sanctuary were unlike the normal rites familiar to residents of the Greek world. The site at Eleusis, including its general layout and architecture, contains structural features that distinguish it from other sanctuaries and the sacrifices that took place in them. First of all, the elevated area within the sanctuary walls contains the Telesterion/Anaktoron complex. This building was distinguished by its size, and by its building-within-a-building design which was quite unknown elsewhere within Attica and indeed within all of classical

⁴⁰ Burkert 1983:282–283. To support his reconstruction, Burkert cites comparative evidence, parallels from the Anatolian Demeter mysteries extrapolated from a myth reported by a much later, and hardly sympathetic, Christian writer. Burkert later modifies this position; Burkert 1987 does not promote any speculation about sacrifice within the Telesterion, noting only the sacrifices in the public spaces: Burkert 1987:109–110.

⁴¹ Garland 1984:103, Mylonas 1961:233, 237, Clinton 1974:82–86.

Greece. Most of the Telesterion was covered by a roof and had abundant seating on all four sides; in this respect the Telesterion resembles a typical Council House, or *Boule*, but is also unlike the *Boule* since there is the smaller building (Anaktoron) in the center.⁴² Ancient literary sources report that the powerful mediating experience of the Eleusinian Mysteries was visual and the seating areas on all four interior walls of the Telesterion certainly suggest a space like an ancient theater.⁴³ But the Telesterion is unlike a theater since it was roofed and since the seating areas focused on the small building in the center and the open space about it.

But the second and most notable point of contrast between the sanctuary at Eleusis and other pan-hellenic sanctuaries is the known location of the altars. During every period of its development, this temple of Demeter was separated from altars by the heavily fortified *peribolos* walls. The altars where priests made sacrifices to the gods are located outside the sanctuary, either 14 miles away in Athens, or in the exterior courtyard at Eleusis alongside the Sacred Way to Athens. It is conceivable that *thusia*, bloody sacrificial ritual performed at altars, played little or no role in the celebration of the nocturnal *mysteria* within the sanctuary and Telesterion. We now know of the *megara*,

⁴² Compare the classical Telesterion plans to the plan in figure 6, a plan of the Athenian Bouleuterion reproduced from Travlos 1971:258. There is no exact parallel for the Telesterion—no temple or municipal roofed building built for seated viewing that also contains a smaller building at the heart of it. The Council House typically had open space at the center: see Travlos 1971:192 for his account of the Bouleuterion in Athens.

⁴³ Terms from the cult like *epopteia* (“viewing”) and *Hierophant* (a “priest who shows sacred things”) imply that the experience was visual, and the literary evidence for visual language is so common that I cannot begin to list it exhaustively. See, for example, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 480–482; Plato *Symposium* 212; Sophocles fr. 719; Pindar fr. 102; the Pausanias quotation in note 1 above; Burkert 1987:91–110. Even the Christian writers speak of what the pagan initiates saw: see Mylonas 1961:288–316 for a discussion of key Christian passages. Because the roof was supported by rows of columns (42 columns total: 6 rows of 7 columns each), the view would have been somewhat obstructed, but that may not have been a significant negative factor in the dark, torch-lit room at night.

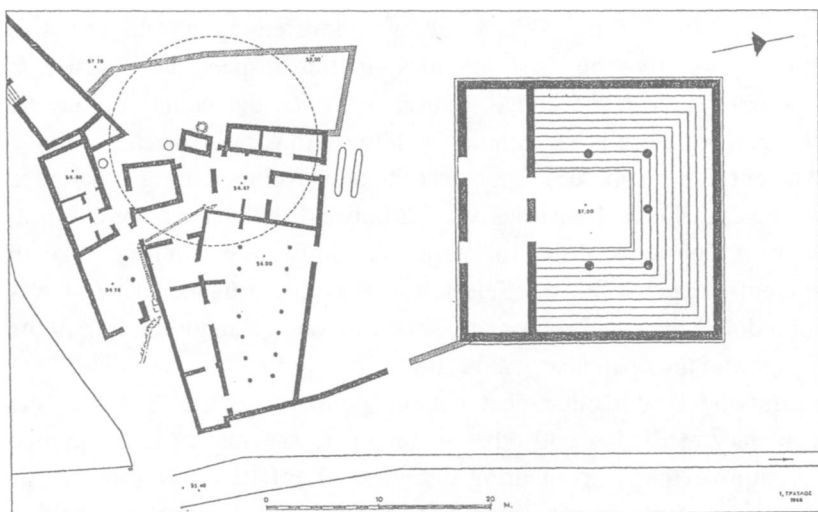


Figure 6. 5th century Bouleuterion in Athens, here shown on the right. Reproduced from Travlos 1971, figure 253.

and we know that the *mysteria* consisted of three parts, *dromena*, *deiknumena*, *legomena* (“things done,” “things shown,” and “things spoken”), none of which necessarily signify ritual sacrifice, though the terms do imply something akin to drama. We also know that unique vessels called *kernoi* and *plemochoai* were used for depositing votive offerings of grains and other plant sacrifices. This combined evidence leaves open the possibility that the *teletai* of Demeter and Kore excluded the shedding of animal blood at altars within the sanctuary.

The ideological reasons for this absence rest on the politics of food and sacrifice in the classical polis. Standard cult sacrifice within the polis entailed a precise protocol. Recent scholarship suggests that we can locate an individual’s precise position within the political structure of the polis by analyzing his or her role in the system of sacrifice.⁴⁴ At a typical sacrifice, or *thusia*, priests and magistrates dedicated specified

⁴⁴ The French are the main proponents of this understanding of *thusia*: see Detienne 1989a and 1989b, Vernant 1989, Zaidman and Schmitt Pantel 1992. Jay 1992 likewise

and inedible parts to the gods and shared *ta splanchna*, the roasted innards, among themselves before distributing the remaining meat to the citizens in attendance.⁴⁵ If the communal meal at a polis sacrifice was distributed to the polity of civic equals—male adult citizens—and if the presence of others (women, foreigners, slaves, children) can not always be verified, the details of how these others received their portions of meat must remain unknown.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, sharing the communal meal did allow the individual to communicate with the gods, while at the same time establishing the landscape of the political community. A series of concentric and overlapping sacrificial communities lay nested within each other in the polis: at the center were priests and official magistrates—those with the most privilege and therefore closest to the gods who were responsible for mediating between the polis and the gods; next was the body of male citizens, the *demos*. Women, children, foreigners and slaves were most often situated on the margin of the sacrificial community, their political, social and cultic position alike subordinate to the citizen male.⁴⁷

Thusia was the norm in the classical Greek polis, and provided most of the meat for the ancient diet.⁴⁸ Many smaller sacrificial

proposes that blood sacrifice solidified the bonds between men in the Athenian political system.

⁴⁵ “The consumption of the *splanchna*, the central moment of the sacrifice as religious act, is in some ways a focal point toward which gestures and actions are directed” (Durand 1989:92).

⁴⁶ This essay does not assume that women and non-citizen men were consigned to a life of vegetarianism. In this respect I agree with Osborne 1993, who has rejected some of the claims from Detienne 1989b.

⁴⁷ For a possibly opposing view see Garland 1984:119 and 75–78, who argues not for a strict hierarchical system of religious authority, but rather for a quite complex system which included the deme, priests, magistrates, oracular authorities, religious “experts,” and administrative assistants. It is unclear exactly how gender and the civic status of metics and slaves fits into Garland’s system of priesthoods, except insofar as priestesses are included in the catalogue of Attic priests.

⁴⁸ Durand 1989:89 defines *thusia* as “Greek alimentary blood sacrifice.” For a detailed and technical discussion of the role of the polis in providing meat for the Athenian diet see Rosivach 1994:3: “Fourth-century Athenians rarely ate fresh meat

communities functioned within the larger whole: communities as small as a neighborhood or a clan, and as large as the entire polis itself. The citizens' participation in the sacrificial community was obligatory. At the same time, however, cultic communities that were—unlike the official polis cults—purely optional and that required a form of *myesis*, or initiation, attracted many followers. These communities are today often called “mystery religions” and the cult of Eleusinian Demeter was of this type.⁴⁹ Mediation with the gods did play a prominent role in the Eleusinian cult, as it did in other mystery religions. I am proposing, however, that the *teletai* in the Telesterion did not require the sacrifice of bulls and the subsequent distribution of meat. Rather the initiates all dedicated the cheapest and most common votive animal offering: the piglet. Perhaps at some now forgotten time in the past, a local women's festival was transformed and men were included in what had formerly been women's rites to Demeter Thesmophoria. Throughout the transformation the votive pig offerings were maintained. Each *mystes* upon entering the Telesterion on the night of 20th Boedromion could have deposited his or her piglet into one of the five pits. The *megara* then could have been bailed out and emptied of their composted contents at a later time by local women at the Eleusinian Thesmophoria, presumably the fertile remains then dedicated to the goddess who taught mankind how to till the soil.⁵⁰

A famous Aristotle fragment comments about initiates to the mysteries: he reports that initiates become worthy not so much because

except at religious sacrifices, when the meat of the sacrificed animals was grilled and/or boiled on the spot and distributed to those in attendance.”

⁴⁹ The bibliography for the so-called “mystery religions” is vast. See Burkert 1987 for extensive bibliography on many of the cults, especially those of Eleusis, Samothrace, Mithras, Cybele and Dionysos. All the “mystery religions” are called “mysteries” by modern scholars on the model of the *mysteria* of Demeter.

⁵⁰ Clinton makes this proposal linking the Mysteries with the local celebration of the Thesmophoria in 1988:78–79. Clinton 1993:120 goes a bit further, and argues that the “Mysteries represent a transformation of the much older Thesmophoria and similar cults open only to women.”

they learn something new (*mathein*) but because they suffer or experience (*pathein*) something appropriate to the proceedings.⁵¹ At Demeter's rites in Eleusis, mystical mediation with the gods was perhaps not an individual and very private form of union, as "mystical" has come to mean in the Christian era, nor was it accomplished by priests officiating at altars over animal sacrifices. Rather this form of mediation with the gods and this knowledge of the gods happened experientially within the group of men and women present in the Telesterion. What they encountered during the festival, both outside the sanctuary and within the central building, led them as a group to an experience that taught them something at an emotional level.⁵² If there is any correspondence between the myth recorded in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the Eleusinian rites,⁵³ perhaps initiates suffered as Demeter and Persephone suffered in the narrative of their separation and reunion. If sacrifice was excluded from the nocturnal mysteries in the Telesterion, the group that commemorated the goddesses' experiences would not have been separated into the conventional categories of social status in the Greek polis, as marked out by the practices of *thusia*. The *teletai* of Demeter at Eleusis thus would stand in sharp contrast to the most common type of sacrificial ritual in the polis. We know that the Telesterion mysteries neither privileged nor marginalized anyone—male or female, citizen or slave. The proclamation on the first day, the public proclamation made in the heart of the agora in Athens, makes that completely clear.

Perhaps some 20th century scholars tried to place *thusia*, bloody sacrificial ritual, at the heart of their reconstructions of the Mysteries because they imagined—or even assumed—a sort of monolithic consistency in cultic practices. *Thusia* privileged priests and magistrates—

⁵¹ Aristotle fragment 15.

⁵² Sourvinou-Inwood 1997 has suggested that during the archaic period individuals became more interested in their own deaths and hopes for an afterlife; she argues that this increased interest led to the rapid growth of the sanctuary.

⁵³ Clinton 1993:112 clearly states that the Hymn and the rites are not to be too closely linked.

the men with visible, political power. This ritualized expression of social hierarchy was necessary for the everyday functioning of Greek society. Even if this type of mediation was absent during the liminal period of the ritual within the Telesterion, the festival certainly did open with multiple sacrifices in the Athenian Eleusinion, and then close in Eleusis with *thusia*, the distribution of meat, and the return to normal social relations.⁵⁴ On the final day of the festival, great civic sacrifices of bulls took place just outside the sanctuary, and all the participants and hangers-on celebrated and feasted in the courtyard outside the sanctuary. Burkert has noted with insight that these final sacrifices fit the conventional rules of civic sacrifice and function as a transition back to the normal world of the polis: “large sacrifices with ample meals of meat would still take place—the normal form of cult was reestablished with the return of normal life.”⁵⁵

The absence of altars within the sanctuary at Eleusis points to a different sort of symbolic relationship between divine and human—as well as human and human—that was experienced during the Eleusinian Mysteries. There are far-reaching implications for the external placement of the altars at Eleusis when we combine this realization with our knowledge of other means of mediation with the divine. The sacrifice of whole piglets in the *megara*; the grain, honey and oil sacrifices in the *kernoi*; the sights or drama witnessed by the initiates in the Telesterion; and the initiates’ own bodily knowledge of an aspect of divine suffering—all these bear witness to the possibility for humans to experience the gods in ways not practiced in the polis cult of animal sacrifice. In this annual ritual of the Eleusinian Mysteries, men and women, citizens, metic foreigners and slaves stood on an equal footing in their experience of and knowledge of the gods. The determining factor for participating in this powerful experience was access to resources—each initiate needed to purchase piglets and needed to pay

⁵⁴ See Endsjø 2000 for his analysis of the “primordial quality” of liminal space (“*ta eschatia*,” or the periphery) in Greek mythology, and his conclusions about why the experience of liminal space was ritualized in the Eleusinian rites.

⁵⁵ Burkert 1983:292.

15 drachmae to the priests to cover the costs of the great civic sacrifices on the first and last days of the festival.⁵⁶ Gender, age, ethnicity, and civic status—citizen, metic or slave—played a different role at Eleusis than in virtually every other type of pan-hellenic cultic experience.

While not egalitarian in the strictest sense because of the financial requirements, the mysteries of Demeter at Eleusis do provide for us another perspective on the political aspects of cult practices in classical Greece. The full range of possibilities for mediation with the gods in the Greco-Roman world included popular and optional modes of worship that temporarily erased many of the distinctions of social status and location. This Eleusinian system of rituals, dedications and sacrifices remained intact throughout the early centuries of the Common Era, and provided a common point of experience for the citizens of the Empire, many of whom went on to form nascent Christian communities. How these later Roman citizens might have translated their experiences into a more Christian idiom I leave for other scholars to explore.

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⁵⁶ In the Classical period, this amounted to 15 drachmae, or about 10 days' wages. Mylonas 1961:237 and note 67; Parke 1977:61.

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WHY IS THE HOLY IMAGE “TRUE”?
THE ONTOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF TRUTH AS A PRINCIPLE
OF SELF-AUTHENTICATION OF FOLK DEVOTIONAL
EFFIGIES IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY

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Summary

The present article examines the twofold material provided by analyses of the borderline between the ethnology of religion and the history of folk art. It refers first of all to the etiological legends of holy images venerated in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-tridentine period, and secondly to folk holy images, in particular woodcut prints, self-declared as “true images,” which were widespread until the last century, and richly represented in Polish folk piety.¹

The thesis put forward in the present article is this: etiological legends of holy images, which universally emphasise the “non-human” origin of miraculous images,² may represent a relic of the archaic

¹ The materials providing the basis for the present article were gathered under the auspices of the Polish Scientific Research Committee (KBN) grant entitled “The mythology of the holy image and the holy place,” which I headed between 1994 and 1998 and in 2000–2002, during my A. von Humboldt scholarship in Heidelberg. The article was translated into English by Michal Pawica.

² See my book entitled *Obraz osobliwy. Hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł etnograficznych*, Kraków 2000, Chapter 8. If a holy image is not directly claimed to be *acheiropoietos*, or not man-made, etiological folk legends normally locate its origins in “Rome,” “the South,” or “Greece,” from where it has been brought by angels, or Constantinople, where it was transferred by St Helen. Often it is also traced back to St Luke, which represents as a matter of fact a delegation of its authorship to Mother of God herself, who miraculously transfers to it the likeness of her face. The image is sometimes “revealed by an unknown hand,” it is said to “come from the table of saints,” and sometimes “it is impossible to find out where it was created.” If it is created by human hand, it is through a particular human being, as if not entirely a man, or more than a man: it is a work of an artist who is drawn to create despite himself,

concept of truth, in which it is seen not as a function of an *adaequatio*, an equivalence between the thing and its likeness, but rather as a property of the being itself, which is true *per se ipsum*.

In the light of the folk, “pre-critical” beliefs on truth, a thing is held to be true because it *is* an image, a book, a name, etc., and not by virtue of fulfilling particular criteria of veracity required of an image, a book, a name, etc. In the folk-type cultures, one could not ask “what is truth?” but it was constantly (if unconsciously) asked “what truly is, and how?” The answer to this question was provided by the cult surrounding all that “truly is,” examples of the phenomenon being both the sacralisation of the written word and the emergence of devotional prints self-acclaimed as “true.” Those prints, scorned by historians of art as commonplace devotional *bric à brac*, are nevertheless worth a close examination by an ethnologist.

the first work of an inexperienced creator, or of a hermit; recording of a dream or a vision of the saints. The image may also be created by one “cured of madness,” by a “criminal sentenced to death,” or by “unknown craftsmen,” who refuse to accept payment in cash or fare, emphasising their angel-like origin. The etiological legend rarely goes beyond the moment when the image is discovered by a group of chosen believers: the blind, the old, children, shepherds or Indians. The image is often found “by accident,” “unexpectedly,” “in an unbecoming place,” “in humiliation,” “in a sorry state.” Once found, the image chooses its own place, to which it stubbornly returns, holding in contempt more splendiferous altars. Legends often associate the creation of the image with elements; here also the event is not perceived as a birth in the literal sense. The holy image is presented like a relic, as a “non-created thing” with no beginning (Greek *ageneton*), and not motivated by any external cause. Therefore, the image is not actually engendered by nature, but merely revealed by it. Thus Mary’s images are often found near the springs, brought by the river or by sea-waves, or “in a boat with no paddles and no sail.” Sometimes they are saved from the waters by an animal. At times the image is ploughed out of the soil or picked up from the mud. The soil may renew the icons that were entrusted to it. It may also reveal stones with imprints of the saints’ hands and feet, though it is not sure whether those stones are extracted from the depths of the earth or if they fall from the sky. The belief in “the things fallen from the sky” is one of the most archetypal images of the Beginning, the embodiment of the Latin formula for a curiosity, *imago insolita*, or an image not-from-this-world.

In the light of the above claim, the naïve inscriptions placed on the framings of woodcut prints—*vera effigies*, *wahre Abbildung*, *le vray portrait*, *actual image* or *true likeness*—which were interpreted so far as an expression of typically folkloric, purely ornamental *verba certa*, should be treated literally. It cannot be ruled out that the image which is “true” *per se ipsum*, by the mere fact of being an image—like the book, which is held to be a synonym of truth (a phenomenon which is a reflection of an ontological concept of language)—are traces of the primitive, “un-Latinised” concept of being, which Mircea Eliade characterises as “archaic ontology.” The offshoots of this forgotten *arché*, which inseparably tied being and truth, can be detected in the obstinate, un-Platonic folk imputation of the status of truth to each image and every book.

Three images

We are introduced into the matter that the present text deals with by three manifestations of Polish folk-religiousness. The first of those is a photograph which presents an aged inhabitant of the Kalwaria Paclawska village displaying her holy picture—a framed woodcut print bearing the likeness of Mary, signed “M[iraculous] image of the Kalwaria M. of G.” The second of the images is a devotional etching representing the Holy Family, signed “An authentic copy [*sic*] of the Miraculous Image of the Holy Family in Miedniewice.”³ The third of the images is a black-and-white print of the holy image of the Częstochowa Madonna, under which a fragment of lace is placed, bearing the inscription: “The veil rubbed against the miraculous picture of The Mother of God at Jasna Góra.” These are two 19th c. images and one among a thousand of prints sold at the foot of the Jasna Góra monastery—typical devotional objects sold at a fair. However, when we take a closer look at them, their typicality turns out to be symbolic. The third of the images is a classical manifestation of the religious

³ The so-called Miedniewice Madonna—a church fair woodcut representing the image of the Holy Family from Studzianna.

sensualism in which sanctity is disseminated through palpation. What are, though, the first and second images?

The key to understanding the nature of the two lies in the phrases “a miraculous image” and the oxymoron “authentic copy.” The first of those descriptions is often found on woodcut images of saints, while the adjective “miraculous” is often replaced by the expression “true,”⁴ or descriptions like “a genuine image” or “a genuine likeness.” A hundred and two hundred years earlier, when Latin was still in current use, those descriptions were much more revealing. *Vera effigies Thaumaturgae Imaginis BV Mariae in Ecclesia Berdyczoviensi* says the inscription under a woodcut print representing the image of the Berdyczów Madonna, renowned for its miraculous powers (1756).⁵ According to the rules that have been observed to apply for similar prints,⁶ this inscription could be transcribed as “the genuine (i.e. true) image of a picture renowned for its miracles and graces,” etc. This is what the full form of an abbreviation like “the Miraculous image of the Kalwaria M. of G.” could read a hundred or two hundred years before. With the passage of time, this double *mimesis* was contracted (“the genuine image [1] of a picture renowned for its miracles and graces” → [2] “a miraculous picture”), but a brief conversation with the owner

⁴ “Most Polish folk woodcuts represent so-called ‘true images’ of holy pictures, most often of the Mother of God” (A. Frys-Pietraszek, A. Kunczynska-Iracka, and M. Pokropek, *Sztuka ludowa w Polsce*, Warsaw 1988, 239).

⁵ M. Kalamajska-Saeed, *Ostra Brama w Wilnie*, Warsaw 1990, Fig. 108.

⁶ For instance an “actual representation of the image of the Holy Mother of God renowned for miracles and graces” (*ib.*, Fig. 109 [mid-18th c.]; see also Fig. 134 (early 19th c.), Fig. 136 (1874), etc. See also J. Grabowski, *Ludowe obrazy drzeworytnicze*, Warsaw 1970, Fig. 63, 68, 114. The same phenomenon is to be observed in the inscription placed under a woodcut print of the Luxembourg Madonna: *Vera effigies Matris IESU Consolatricis afflictorum in agro suburbano Luxemburgi Miraculis et Hominum Visitatione celebris Anno 1640* (Joan Carroll Cruz, *Miraculous Images of Our Lady: 100 Famous Catholic Statues and Portraits*, Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books 1994, henceforth referred to as “Cruz”). On the principles of calling an image “miraculous” (*imago miraculosa*) or merely “renowned for graces” (*imago gratiosa*), see *Jasnogórska Bogurodzica*, Warsaw 1982, 191–198.

of the print is sufficient to confirm that here the power of the *mimesis* was not in the least lessened despite its being once removed from the original.

In the perception of the modern-day inhabitants of Kalwaria Paclawska, the characteristic “miraculous” refers in equal measure to the original (“the picture”) and to its woodcut representation (“the print”).⁷ “The holy picture is the original, but the copy and the original can be holy if you consecrate them. If you believe that—say, you have a print of the Kalwaria Madonna—She is miraculous and the print is consecrated; you can pray to this image, for it is faith that that gives it, so I would say, the truthfulness. You believe it, whether She is in Kalwaria or in the image.”⁸ In the Podolak household and at their neighbours,’ many consecrated images are to be found, but none of them enjoys the kind of fame that this bleached, leakage-marked woodcut print does.⁹ The profound relation obtaining between the church original and the consecrated copy is even more clearly voiced in the case of the second print, described—in discord with the logic as we know it, but in accordance with the folk beliefs on sameness and difference—as “an authentic copy.” It is to reconstructing such beliefs, which allow for the copy to be “authentic” and, by the same token, for a commonplace devotional print to be classified as “true,” that this article is devoted.

Self authentication

The Kalwaria and Miedniewice prints are united with the Czestochowa devotional print by the principle through which they self-

⁷ Own field study, 1994–1999, catalogue number 199.2 (henceforth referred to as JTB followed by the catalogue number).

⁸ JTB 28 (18A).

⁹ In a number of instances, such cheap prints have been sacralised and gained the status of independent sanctity, e.g. the 18th c. Tursko Madonna, which is a copy of the Mariazell Madonna, the 17th c. Madonna of the Ill from Kevlaer, Germany, a copy of the Luxembourg Madonna (see Cruz), or the afore-mentioned Madonna of Miedniewice.

authenticate themselves. In all of those, the authentication is performed by pointing to the genesis of the candidate for the status of holiness. The auto-verification is performed by the reference to the exemplar of the image, yet not to the actual person of Mother of God, who is its prototype, the *Urbild*, but rather to the church exemplar set by the holy picture, the *Bild*.

“The veil rubbed against the miraculous picture of The Mother of God at Jasna Góra,” the “authentic copy,” and “the genuine (i.e. true) image of the picture of Miraculous image of the Kalwaria Madonna” are three manners in which the non-differentiation between the *Bild* and the *Abbild*, the holy picture and its copy, is expressed. Yet the question of the validity of such testimonies of “truthfulness” imposes itself—according to the resolutions of the Council of Trent, a holy picture is solely authenticated by the “prototype” it pictures.¹⁰ If the prototype were to be manifested in an identical manner in each image, there would be no point demonstrating the relationship between the miraculous picture and its cheap reproduction, which has been touched with a veil or is authenticated by a testimony of its “authenticity” printed on a Xerox copy. The self-authentication of prints, voiced

¹⁰ *Decretum de invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis Sanctorum et sacriis imaginibus* (a Council of Trent resolution announced during the 25th session on December 3rd, 1563) states: “The images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of other saints are to be kept with honour in places of worship especially; and to them due honour and veneration is to be paid—not because it is believed that there is any divinity of power intrinsic to them for which they are revered, nor because it is from them that something is sought, nor that a blind trust is to be attached to images as it once was by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols [cf. Ps 134:15ff.], but because the honour which is shown to them is referred to the prototypes which they represent. Thus it follows that through these image which we kiss and before which we kneel and uncover our heads, we are adoring Christ and venerating the saints whose likenesses these images bear. That is what is enacted by the decrees of the councils, especially the Second Council of Nicaea, against the opponents of images” (*The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translation*, St. Louis and London: B. Herder Book Co. 1955, 215–16; cf. H. Denziger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 35th. ed., Barcinone 1973, 985 [henceforth referred to as: DS]).

most clearly in such inscriptions as *effigies vera, wahre Abbildung, le vray portrait, or actual image* (in Polish, *obraz prawdziwy or prawdziwe podobienstwo*), perforce expresses the belief that in some images the power of the prototype is accumulated with more potency than in others. Such a special image becomes a kind of reliquary for the prototype, and it shines not only with the prototype's reflected light, but also with its own. In it, the prototype experiences a sort of "enhancement of being."¹¹

Roman Catholic theology denies as a matter of principle that an image assures the presence of the person represented in it. The documents of the Council of Trent state clearly that it should not be believed that in an image, a deity (*divinitas*) or power (*virtus*) is present.¹² According to Catholic theologians, such a stance does not in any way depart from the teachings of the Second Council of Nice.¹³ The Council documents, which are largely a response to the idolatry accusations raised by the Protestants, avoid getting involved in the details of the matter, and ascribe all the graces that can be received through a holy picture to the properties of the prototype. Closer reading of the Council resolution reveals, however, that its very authors were not free from the belief that despite the obvious "unity" of the prototype (*Urbild*), one image (*Bild*) is not equal to another, and that sanctity amasses in images in its own mysterious ways. This is to be seen in the resolution of the Council entrusting the bishops

¹¹ Pavel Florensky thus describes icons: "According to the teachings of the fathers of the 7th Universal Council, art is supposed to act as a 'reminder'. . . It should be constantly kept in mind that the nomenclature of the Fathers of the Church is the nomenclature of Greek idealism, and that it is completely penetrated with ontology. . . . What is meant is not any kind of a subjective remembering on the part of the artist, but rather 'remembering' in the sense of Plato's *anamnesis*, i.e. revealing the idea itself in the idiom of the senses" P.A. Florenskii, "Molennye ikony prepodobnogo Sergiia," *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii* 9 (1969) 80–90.

¹² The Council specifically stated that the images of Christ, of his Mother and of the saints should enjoy reverent veneration (*timetiké proskínesis*), which is not tantamount to the actual adoration (*alethiné latreía*) (DS 601).

¹³ DS, *ibidem*.

with the responsibility of assuring that art complies with requirements of orthodoxy and of verifying that the images that are venerated are not subject to the accusation of *falsum dogma*.¹⁴ This resolution only concerns the images being objects of public cult, and that only if they should be “unusual.”¹⁵

The belief that the sacred is not distributed equally in different images is characteristic of Eastern Orthodox religious sensibility.¹⁶ It is well known that within this spirituality, certain icons were venerated as relics. “Those were the icons which used to remain in some sort of contact with the saint depicted in the picture,” a modern historian writes.¹⁷ They became the iconographic archetype: they were constantly copied and their miraculous powers were believed to be transmitted onto copies, as long as the copyist faithfully recorded the features of the acclaimed prototype.¹⁸ Historians of cult posit that a certain *rapprochement* of Eastern and Western type of piety occurred around the 14th c. and that the phenomenon was manifested by the change of beliefs concerning the nature of a religious image. Up to that point, Western religiousness was shaped by the heritage of the

¹⁴ In Poland, the Council resolutions were implemented through the decisions of the Cracow Synod organised by Bishop Marcin Szyszkowski in 1621, which entrusted the bishops with the responsibility of assuring the orthodoxy of the art. See D. Luszczek, “Koronowane kopie obrazu Matki Bożej Jasnogórskiej od XV do XVII wieku w Polsce,” *Studia Claromontana* 10 (1989) 192.

¹⁵ For the term *imago insolita*, see DS 1821.

¹⁶ Sergei Bulgakov states that each icon is in principle miraculous, adding however, that “venerated as miraculous icons in the proper sense of the term are those icons which have demonstrated their power in an especially clear and accessible manner” (“Ikona i kult ikon w prawosławiu,” *Wiadomości Polskiego Autokefalicznego Kościoła Prawosławnego* 1975, 36).

¹⁷ M. Kowalewiczowa, “Wokół ‘Peregrynacji’ Mikołaja Lanckorońskiego,” *Studia Claromontana* 5 (1984) 63.

¹⁸ *Ib.* A detailed analysis of the image theology in Eastern Christianity is to be found in T. Łukaszuk, “Teologia świętego obrazu-ikony. Studium z dziedziny teologii ekumenicznej,” *Studia Claromontana*, 1 (1981) 42, as well as in the fundamental work by Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, tr. A. Gythiel and E. Meyendorff, 2 vols., Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992.

Libri Carolini and treated images as mere vessels for relics. Suddenly around the 14th c. the potency so far attributed merely to relics was somehow bestowed onto certain images, which began to be treated on par with the relics, later on to replace them completely. E. Sniezyńska-Stolot states that royalty travelling through Europe at that time (e.g. the Hungarian Anjou kings or Charles IV) developed a lively interest in Italo-Byzantine images.¹⁹ This interest was further amplified by the influence of legends about discoveries of miraculous images by lay rulers (Constantine, Eudoxia, Justinian, Pulcheria, Germanicus the Patriarch and others) and popularised by the story of St. Helen's discovery of the Holy Cross, as well as by the intensified search for *acheiropoietoi* ("non-man-made images,"), i.e. "true images" (Lat. *vera icon*) of Jesus and Mary, for instance those allegedly produced during the lives of Luke and Nicodemus.²⁰ The advent of those "true images" was accompanied by an invasion of copies. At the close of the Middle Ages, the demand for the *vera icon* was so high that the copyists producing them formed a separate guild.²¹ This was the second *vera icon* epidemic in the history of Christianity. The first, recorded in the 8th c.,²² has often been interpreted as a response to the arguments of iconoclasts—the true, non-made image was the only one to be safe from their accusations. However, the occurrence of iconoclasts cannot be held to provide an explication for the second

¹⁹ E. Sniezyńska-Stolot, "Kult italo-bizantyjskich obrazów maryjnych w Europie środkowej w w. XIV," *Studia Claromontana* 5 (1984) 22–23.

²⁰ *Ib.*

²¹ Cf. *Lexikon der Kunst*, Leipzig 1968–1978, 4:422, s.v. "Schweisstuch der Veronika"; I. Wilson, *The Shroud of Turin: The Burial Cloth of Jesus Christ?* Image Books: New York 1979. After the 4th Crusade, there was an increased demand for true images, i.e. those "of Oriental origin, either from the Holy Land or the Byzantine world. Those images enjoyed practically the same status as relics."

²² *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, tr. H. Turtledove, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1982, 113 (Sept. 1, 746 – Aug. 31, 747): "Suddenly and in some unseen fashion, a great number of small oily crosses began to appear on men's cloaks, on the holy garb of the churches and on their curtains."

wave of “true images,” and of their sturdy presence in European religious culture ever since.²³

It seems that the inscription “actual representation” or “true image” incorporated into a 18th or 19th c. devotional print is a folkloric rendering of the concept of the *vera icon*, or the not man-made image. Does the perseverance of this motive in European culture arise merely from the persistence of the obsolete, or is it possibly founded on another, more profound rationale?

The truthfulness of image: the object of study

Let us first determine the object to which the discussion of image truthfulness applies. It will be convenient to describe first those issues which will *not* be addressed by the following remarks. Among them will be the *vera icon* in the strict historical sense: the image of Christ’s face imprinted on the kerchief, which is a late Western Christian travesty²⁴ of the Eastern Christian motive of the non man-made image (Gk *acheiropoietos*), embodied in the personage of Veronica, allegedly specially created for the purpose.²⁵ In the tradition of Western Christianity, the notion of “true image” (*vero-icon*, *vera-icon*) may refer either to a representation of St. Veronica’s kerchief, eponymically referred to as “veronica” (the face of Christ on the way to Calvary, with marks of the suffering, eyes usually half-closed), or to the iconographic model

²³ See E. v. Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur 18)*, Leipzig 1989, p. **268–269, **275, 28, 79, 99, etc.

²⁴ It is supposedly first mentioned in the 12th c., and the motif becomes widespread only two centuries later (E. Kuryluk, *Veronica and her cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a “True” Image*, Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell 1991, Chapter 8). A detailed genealogy of the true image is presented in Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*.

²⁵ Worth noting is the fact that, in a typically “oral” fashion, the saint’s name bears a reflexive relation to the compound *vero-icon*, *vero-iconia* (recorded thus by Giraldus Cambrensis, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, 4:278f.; tr. H. Thurston, *The Holy Year of Jubilee*, London 1900, 193–194) and eponymised to the name of the “veronica.”

known as mandillion²⁶ (the face of Christ with eyes wide open, with no marks of suffering, miraculously imprinted on the kerchief, or the so-called Abgar image). Neither of those is relevant to our research.

The image whose truthfulness will be considered here is in fact a “print,” such as the two woodcuts we discussed at the start. These represent a folk travesty of the “high” motives mentioned above, and are normally found in the shape of printed, sometimes hand-painted, images sold at fairs, pilgrimage sites, etc. Self-authentication techniques such as the one described for the examples discussed above are to my knowledge exclusive to such prints, and are never found in oils of the saints. The following issues are salient for the discussion of the phenomenon of the “true images”:

- 1) The specifications “a true image,” “a true likeness,” *vera effigies*, *wahre Abbildung*, *le vray portrait*, or “an actual representation” are in fact inscriptions found on the frames of the woodcuts, lithographs or etchings such as those described above, which—due to their availability and affordability—began, with the propagation of printing techniques, to play an increasingly important role in individual piety in the post-tridentine period.²⁷ To my knowledge, no such specifications were attached to images placed on an altar or in a chapel—unless it was such a print that was elevated to the altar, as in the case of Poland’s Our Lady of Tursko and Our Lady of Miedniewice, Germany’s Sufferers’ Comfort of Kevlaer,²⁸ or others.

²⁶ Which stems from the Arabic for “cloth” (Kuryluk, *op. cit.*, 4, etc.) In Orthodox spirituality, the typological *acheiropoieton* will be represented not only by the mandillion, but also by the so-called *epitaphion*, or a representation of Christ in tomb, a face veil or an altar covering.

²⁷ See H. Dünninger, “Wahres Abbild: Bildwallfahrt und Gnadenbildkopie,” in *Wallfahrt kennt keine Grenzen: Themen zu einer Ausstellung des Bayerischen Nationalmuseums und des Adalbert Stifter Vereins*, ed. L. Kriss-Rettensbeck and G. Möhler, München 1984, 274–283.

²⁸ Cf. the following caption under a paper print reproduced in Cruz: *Vera effigies Matris Iesu consolatricis afflictiorum i agro suburbano Luxemburgi Miraculis et Hominum Visitatione celebris Anno 1640.*

- 2) These facts indicate that formulations like “a true image,” “a true likeness,” *vera effigies*, *wahre Abbildung*, *le vray portrait*, or “an actual representation” are in fact folk rather than Church expressions. This is an attribute that is not to be found in the resolutions of the Council of Trent, which nevertheless make references to *imago insolita*, *gratiosa* or *miraculosa*.²⁹ A paper print provided with a self-authentication could only be perceived by the Church hierarchy as a fake. As late as at the turn of the 20th c., Father Waclaw of Sulgostów excluded from his work *On Poland's Miraculous Images*, “the folk prints, which are devoid of the signs of craft and faithful representation of the holy images.”³⁰ The golden age of this form of “self-authentication” starts after the Council of Trent and continues until the 19th c. The authors of *Polish Folk Art* affirm that “the majority of Polish folk woodcuts represent so-called ‘true images’ of miraculous pictures, most often of Our Lady.”³¹
- 3) The description “true” on folk woodcuts does not make reference to the original exhibited in a church (the authenticity of the *Bild* need not be confirmed, nor would such a confirmation be within the powers of the folk *sensus communis*), but rather to its woodcut representation (*Abbild*), or the *mimesis mimeseos*, a product of a mass printing process. Therefore in this case the truth value is ascribed to an entity that Plato (*Republic*, Book 10) dismissed completely as “thrice removed from truth,” despite the Church’s disapproval, which has been expressed quite unam-

²⁹ *Decretum de invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis Sanctorum et sacriis imaginibus* (a Council of Trent resolution announced at the 25th session on December 3rd, 1563), see DS1823. See also F. Diekamp, *Theologiae Dogmaticae Manuale*, Paris 1950, 2:294–297; P. Bayerschmidt, “Bilderverehrung,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., 2:466–467.

³⁰ Waclaw z Sulgostowa, *O cudownych obrazach w Polsce Przenajswietszej Matki Bozej*, Kraków 1902, 4.

³¹ A. Frys, A. Kunczynska-Iracka, and M. Pokropek, *Sztuka ludowa w Polsce*, Warsaw 1988, 239.

biguously. The image signed as *vera effigies* is a true likeness (3) of an inaccessible painting located in a church (2).

The phenomenon of double *mimesis*, which produces a sequence of three levels of representation, can be recorded in an abbreviated form presented in the following figure, in which non-differentiation concerns the first (as it is usually the case for miraculous images) or the second level of *mimesis* (for “true” prints):

1) *Urbild*

1st degree *mimesis* Non-differentiation 1°: the true image

2) *Bild*

2nd degree *mimesis* Non-differentiation 2°: the true “print”

3) *Abbild*

A similar two-stage *mimesis*, with an emphasis on the truthfulness of the *Abbild*, or the end product, is preserved in so many of the inscriptions placed on woodcuts that the remaining inscriptions (such as “The true Image of St. Isidore,”³² “The true Image of St. Joseph,”³³ etc., as well as, repeatedly, “the image of. . .,” followed by the name of the represented saint) appear to be abbreviations of the basic inscription, of the following form:

- “the Image of Mary Mother of God in the Leżajsk Bernardine church, renowned for miracles”³⁴
- “the True Image of the Virgin Mary who is known for miracles”³⁵
- “INRI, the True Representation of Jesus in Kobylonka”³⁶
- “an Authentic Representation of the Miraculous Image of the Holy Virgin Mary at the Ostra Brama in Vilnius.”³⁷ etc.

The question towards which we are heading is the following: what is the concept of truth that the folk *sensus communis* bases upon

³² J. Grabowski, *Ludowe obrazy drzeworytnicze*, Warsaw 1970, Fig. 114, p. 236.

³³ *Ib.*, frontispiece.

³⁴ The Leżajsk Madonna; *ib.*, p. 166, Fig. 44.

³⁵ The Czestochowa Madonna; *ib.*, p. 180, Fig. 58.

³⁶ The Kobylonka Christ; *ib.*, p. 185, Fig. 63.

³⁷ *Ib.*, p. 68.

in recognising such an image, which according to Plato is “thrice removed from truth,” as “true”? In preparation to answer that question let us pose another problem: what role is performed in the self-authentication of those by writing and print?

Such questions have been repeatedly dismissed by positing lackadaisically that “true” folk prints simply imitate the Church *concordia cum originalis* formula, which is traditionally the basis for granting the *imprimatur* to copies of holy images.³⁸ However, the ethnographer who keeps in mind the incredible careers of “true stories,” ever-present on illustrated magazine covers, in film titles, Harlequin literature and brochures sold at fairs during Church holidays, should, rather than being discouraged by the alleged secondariness of the folk “true image,” be drawn all the more to study the phenomenon, seeing in it an expression of a worldview in which truth is produced by imitation or a magical reiteration of The Same.

“The image” as the source of “the prints”

Let us ponder first the third of the aspects of the phenomenon discussed above, i.e. the “precession” of *mimesis*, or the transfer of question of image truthfulness from the relation obtaining between the *Urbild* and the *Bild* onto that obtaining between the *Bild* and the *Abbild*.

In order to address this issue, let us analyse appropriate Eastern Christianity data. Researchers of icon painting³⁹ point out that the

³⁸ The Church has not always been liberally disposed towards copies and prints. In different times of Western Christian history, the number of copies—or replicas—was strictly controlled, as testified for instance by the threat of excommunication on anybody who would draw an unauthorised copy, placed on a replica of the *Sancta Sanctorum acheropith* of 1617. Another measure limiting the freedom of copying was a canonical law regulation prohibiting veneration of images on paper, e.g. chromolithographs (Cruz 263). In the Eastern Christian tradition, copying was only limited by requirements concerning the canonical character of the image.

³⁹ I base my description on information provided by Professor Barbara Dab-Kalinowska from the Department of Art History, University of Warsaw, Poland.

status of an icon underwent a gradual evolution in the Orthodox Church, in the course of which an increasing emphasis was placed on the miracle-endowing power of the image itself at the expense of its Prototype. This process is to be clearly seen in:

- 1) a modification in the content of the inscriptions placed on the icon bordering, where tales of the miracles performed by the represented saint are gradually replaced by tales of the miraculous influence of the icon itself,
- 2) an increasing emphasis on celebrations devoted not only to the different saints, but also to the cult surrounding particular icons.⁴⁰

Such phenomena gain significance in Russia in the late 17th c., and they reach their apogee in the 18th and the 19th c., i.e. precisely at the time of the renaissance of “true images” in the West. It is at exactly the same moment that tendencies start to build up in Russia which will lead to the heterodoxy of Old Believers, who introduced metal casts to replace the icons painting, whose canons they found excessively relaxed. Both phenomena—the transferring of the miraculous power from the Prototype onto the image, and the control of the icon standard by the Old Believers—are two different reactions to the same phenomenon, or the “precession” of the image truthfulness, which is gradually transferred from the first (*Urbild-Bild*) to the second (*Bild-Abbild*) *mimesis* level.

If the Orthodox icon is sanctified by its conformity to the iconographic canons,⁴¹ the Old-Believer icons are an expression of an unrelenting anti-relativism, which is symbolically expressed in the replace-

⁴⁰ This phenomenon is described in Grazyna Kobrzeniecka-Sikorska's doctoral thesis *Rosyjskie ikony maryjne w okresie ponikonianskim i ich polityczno-religijne wartosciowanie*, Department of History, University of Warsaw 2000.

⁴¹ On the iconographic canon and the ensemble of painting methods that it is implemented through (the artist's canon), see V.V. Bychkov, *Vizantiiskaia estetika*, Moscow 1977.

ment of the Orthodox painting canons⁴² by the Old-Believer metal mould.

With all their differences, both the Orthodox canon and the Old-Believer mould are, *toutes proportions gardées*, an embodiment of an identical underlying idea: that of a canon, assuring faithful reproduction of the form. It is the meticulous recreation of the form, along with the inscription accompanying it (the name) that assures the transfer of the Prototype's benediction. Only such an image can be consecrated through a solemn ceremony which "institutes the association between the image and its Prototype." If we were to compare the manner in which a woodcut or lithographic print is self-authenticated in the Western culture with the way in which truthfulness is endowed by virtue of conformity to the canon in Eastern Christianity, we will observe the following similarities:

- 1) a print signed as "true" normally makes no reference to the *Urbild*, but rather it schematically recreates the form of the *Bild*, a church likeness = the precession of *mimesis* from the 17th c. on;
- 2) thanks to printing, the image remains unchanged = Old-Believer moulds, and, to a lesser extent, the painting canon;
- 3) the image is signed and additionally characterised as "true," "actual," *wahr*, *vray*, or *vera* = the inscription on an icon conditions its conformity to the canon, and the veneration of the icon concerns in equal degree the Prototype's likeness and name.

Let us attempt to grasp the folk logic behind the self-authentication of a print. A certain precedent for this kind of self-authentication was set by the influence of the artefact known in mediaeval folk

⁴² The first historically recorded of those canons is A.P. Stroganov's icon-painting handbook (*Stroganovskii ikonopisnyi litsevoi podlinnik*), which appeared at the turn of the 16th and the 17th c. The saint's sketch was transferred from the handbook onto a primed board by a set of complex techniques, including the use of birch bark and needles. The high status of the task in icon painting is revealed by the fact that this operation was performed by the *ikonopisets*, who was the highest-ranked among the artisans working on the icon.

Christian spirituality as *longitudo Christi*,⁴³ a few-inch *apotropeion* against sudden death⁴⁴ called “The True Measure of the Body Our Lord, Jesus Christ.” It appears that the *longitudo* was “true” by virtue of faithfully reproducing the “measure of measures” taken from Christ’s martyred body on the cross. This faithfulness is at no odds with the figurativeness of the artefact—in order to arrive at the literal dimensions of Christ’s body, the measure needed to be multiplied by 33. Such figurativeness is not foreign to the woodcut version of the “true likeness,” which imitates its original in the same manner as the above-mentioned “measure”: it represents the basic characteristics of the *Bild* by resorting to a conventional schema (for instance, the Czestochowa Madonna is differentiated from others only by her facial scars, and the Ostra Brama Madonna only by the sharp design of light rays surrounding the figure). The image in those is often so schematic that one can hardly speak of *Bild* imitation at all (see the description by Father Wacław of Sulgostów, who perceives such prints as “devoid of the signs of craft and faithful representation of the holy images”). If it is not by virtue of faithful representation, how is a print recognised as “true”?

I believe that from the point of view of the culture which verified those holy prints, the authentication of a print was founded on the following rudimentary assumptions:

- 1) first of all, on an archaic concept of truth characteristic for this culture, and on an “uncritical” qualification of an image as sacred—true “by virtue of being” rather than of “resemblance to what is true,” a concept of truth which was not limited to images, but encompassing writing as well;
- 2) secondly, on the exceptional status granted in the culture to printing seen as a magical variety of repetition;

⁴³ See my book, *Obraz osobliwy*, Chapter 6.

⁴⁴ “True images” carried on a person were believed to guard one from similar dangers as *longitudo* and “letters from heaven.” Freedberg quotes a Latin prayer spoken during a ceremony during which they were consecrated: D. Freedberg, *Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago 1989, 124.

- 3) thirdly, on the physical contact between the print and the original, thanks to which the *Abbild* was endowed with the status of the *Bild*; and finally,
- 4) on the ontological value of the inscription (the name equals the thing), which includes the name of the person represented along with the performative declaration of its “truthfulness.”

The ontological concept of truth and its longevity

A few remarks must be provided first concerning the philosophical system which is implicit in the image and the word being perceived as true *per ipsum*, and in which the concept of truth is not based on “similarity,” “adequacy,” or “equality.”

This is a concept of truth well known and celebrated in the history of philosophy. “Since time immemorial,” Heidegger writes, “truth and being have belonged to each other, if they have not been completely identified with each other.”⁴⁵ Giovanni Reale adds: “For a Greek, being is truth.”⁴⁶ The Greek expression *esti auto* (“it is so”) is tantamount to the expression “it is true,” “this is the way things are.” The declaration of being amounts to the declaration of fact, of truth. Charles K. Kahn, the author of a fundamental work on the Greek concept of being, claims that being was by nature defined as “aletheic,” a name derived from the Greek term for “truth” (*aletheia*, “the non-concealed”).⁴⁷ Yet when we attempt to understand truth as a property of being within today’s categories of what is true and false, it takes us a long time to get the gist of the idea at all. How can one relate the concept of being to truth at all? What does combining the fact of “being” with that of “being true” entail?

⁴⁵ M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §44: “Die Philosophie hat von altersher Wahrheit mit Sein zusammengestellt.”

⁴⁶ G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica. Dalle Origini a Socrate*, 6th ed., Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1989, Appendix 2.6.

⁴⁷ Ch.H. Kahn, *The Verb “be” in Ancient Greek (= The Verb “be” and its Synonyms: Philosophical and Grammatical studies*, ed. J.W.M. Verhaar, vol. 6 [*Foundations of Language: Supplementary Series* 16]), Dordrecht: Reidel 1973.

The inaccessibility of ontological concepts of truth to the modern mind has been brought about by centuries-long dominance of the so-called classical concept of truth. This concept is most often encountered today in the shape of a simplified version of Aquinas' interpretation, who, relating to Aristotle, rectified the ontological concept of truth found in the writings of Augustine, Anselm and Matthew of Aquasparta,⁴⁸ and determined that truth resides not in the thing, but in the thought. The influence of the ontological concept of truth was so strong that the scholastic formula *veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem* was long refused philosophical recognition,⁴⁹ and was only popularised in the 13th c. Some researchers—mostly of Heideggerian persuasion—point out that the predominant compatibility-based concept of truth is secondary in respect to the perception of truth as a property of the being itself, its “openness,” or the power of discovering that a thing is as it is, that is embodied in being. It is the “openness” of being which may provoke reflection upon, and formulation of the perceived state of affairs.

The ontological concept of truth in religion: the image

The extent to which this motive of the identity between thought and being, and later also between image and being and between word and being, is reflected and sustained in folk-type culture, is symptomatic. One can hardly imagine a religion which would not be based on this double ontological equation. The ontological concept of truth was at the source of both the cult of images and the

⁴⁸ It is expressed in Augustine's famous formula *verum est id quod est* (“That is true which is”), which ascribes truth-value to things first, and only then to words and thoughts. Anselm writes, “Everyone speaks of the truth of signification but very few consider the truth which is in the essence of things,” and Matthew of Aquasparta claims that “if there were no truth in the thing, there would be no truth in the understanding, since the truth of the thing is the source of that,” quoted in G. Allen, *Truth in Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1993, 12.

⁴⁹ *Ib.*, 186, n1.

rebellion of the iconoclasts.⁵⁰ The ontological concept of (the truth of) word, in turn, is a foundation of both the obligation of recording and naming the Holy, embodied in liturgy, and the prohibition of it.

The ontological concepts of image and speech sometimes intertwine, something which is particularly clearly expressed in the names used for sacral painting. Its Russian name, *ikonopis*, is an exact rendering of the Greek *iconography*, and the motive of writing is also to be seen in the Tibetan *lha bris*—literally, “the writing of gods.” The Russian term for painting in general, *zhivopis*, supplies another crucial characteristic of the art—the imitation of life; this element is also present in a parallel name for icon painting, *zhivopodobyie*. Also the term for a false icon, *bohomas*, somehow expresses the belief in the ontological value of even imperfect representations of deity.⁵¹ The combination of the concepts of “painting” and “writing” in the word “iconography” reveals its concealed theurgic, creative nature,⁵² a fact which most likely was also at the origins of iconoclasm, or non-differentiation *à rebours*.

According to the ontological concept of truth, a thing is true because it is what is *per se ipsum*. The truth-value, as it is the case in Greek, is associated with the copular function of the verb “to be.” The very statement “*x* is a painting,” or “*y* is a writing,” is sufficient for the folk *sensus communis* to declare the truthfulness of *x* or *y*. This occurs by the power of non-differentiation, sometimes going all the way to magically merging the *signans* and the *signatum*, which in the case of writing is tantamount to the ontological concept of language-being. The “uncritical” concept of truth can hardly be

⁵⁰ L. Kochan, *Beyond the Graven Image: A Jewish View*, London 1997.

⁵¹ See the speculation on life which is carried on concerning idols (Heb. *elilim*), *ib.*, 11, 20.

⁵² This issue is raised by P.A. Florensky, whose remarks are quoted in the entry “*Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo i mifologiya*,” in *Mify narodov mira. Entsiklopediia*, Moscow 1988, 1:483.

expressed better than in the popular, folk interpretation, according to which:

y is true because:

“I read about it in the newspaper, book, saw it on TV,
heard it on the radio”;⁵³

x is true because:

“I saw it in a picture, photograph etc.”

In the folk-type culture, it is the witness criterion of truth that is dominant. Polish anthropologist Roch Sulima writes:

Folk comments on the world repeatedly emphasise oppositions of the “similar-different,” “true-untrue” type. This is a criterion of describing and discovering the world which is based on personal experience. Peasant culture in the shape known to us so far has been founded upon belief in the spoken word, and the credibility of the speaker, who utters words here and now, rather than on interpretation and comparison of written records, images and judgements found in books or other intermediary sources. Until a certain moment, writing and books had a mythical, magical value, and often functioned as pictograms, images or sacral objects whose significance was treated as a given, and which were surrounded by mystery.⁵⁴

These observations are confirmed by the famous German antiquarian, Ludwig Zimmerer, who writes:

Sculptors and painters who are illiterate or who have considerable difficulties in reading and writing are often characterised by a particularly intense relationship with the written, and in particular, the printed word; they strive to provide possibly the most exact name to what they depict. For instance Mrs Wisnios [a renowned Polish folk painter] perceives almost any book as magical or holy and revealing things which are concealed from fools. She will never paint anything of her own invention, but only what has according to her truly happened. She takes literally the descriptions of the lives of saints provided in black and white in books. She would never dare change the slightest detail while painting. She considers her paintings unfinished until her son provides

⁵³ Cf. also the folk “to see something in black and white,” which expresses the perception of writing as the paragon of factuality, i.e. a kind of a truth criterion.

⁵⁴ R. Sulima, “Album ‘cieni.’ Slowo i fotografia w kulturze ludowej,” in *Slowo i etos*, Warszawa 1993, 117–118.

a description of their content in block capitals. The same obtains for the tin plaques which Mr Chajec [a renowned Polish folk sculptor] produces with a great amount of care and effort. These are not an addition to the statue: in Chajec's view, it is only through them that the statue attains the status of a document.⁵⁵

Zimmerer's testimony incorporates the two categories of ontological truth, which are known and almost tautological:

- 1) almost (?) any book is magical or holy, i.e. true;
- 2) what is true in a painting is what has not been "invented," but has "truly" happened;
- 3) the represented thing only acquires the entirety of being by virtue of the inscription (\approx the inscription on the icon as the requirement of its canonicity)

The sacral value of image and writing may be intensified as a result of the form chosen for its communication (the communicator being the message itself), which, as Marshall McLuhan teaches, is an act of communication itself. Let us in this context consider photography first, and print later on.

Sulima quite rightly observes that it is photography rather than painting, description or journal which heralds the end of the spoken-word monopoly in folk culture. The advantages of photography over other media are described in a penetrating study by Roland Barthes. "Photography," he writes, "has something in common with Resurrection."⁵⁶ And more emphatically still: this is a kind of *acheiropoietos*, something not made by the human hand.⁵⁷

Just as the magic of image culminates in photography ("I'm sending you my shadow," says the inscription on the back of one of peasant pictures, while others refer to the image as one's "soul," "heart," or

⁵⁵ L. Zimmerer, "Rozwazania w obliczu Swietego Michala Archaniola, wyrzezbionego w roku 1971 przez Wladyslawa Chajca z Kamienicy Górnej," *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 3-4 (1976) 239.

⁵⁶ R. Barthes, *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris 1980, §35.

⁵⁷ *Ib.*

“eyes”⁵⁸), the magic of writing is paradoxically intensified in print. Printing equips writing with the quality of indestructibility, or—as Sulima puts it—“a pass to eternity.”⁵⁹ However, this association with indestructibility does not exhaust the matter. There is one element that print, photography and “The True Measure of the Body Our Lord, Jesus Christ” have in common: the motive of a “seal,”⁶⁰ of a magical repetition, which, far from distorting the image, miraculously transfers (expands?) its identity. Thanks to print and photography on the one hand, and the unchangeable measure of Christ’s body on the other, the shape of the very thing is transferred faithfully without intervention of human hand, and with a meticulousness resembling that of the Orthodox canon and the Old-Believer mould. The shape is rendered so faithfully that the thing in question is as if no longer copied, but rather becomes subject to miraculous multiplication. It was in this manner that in Byzantium *acheiropoiatoi* multiplied,⁶¹ and in treasuries and churches—relics, *mensurae* taken from Christ’s footprints in Pilatus’ praetorium,⁶² “letters from heaven” (which have grown into today’s “chains of luck”), as well as the *longitudo*, which—in the form of multifarious magical belts that were said to have belonged to almost every saint—mushroomed all over mediaeval and post-tridentine Europe. Which belt is true, if the thing that is true in all of them is the same “measure” taken from the archetype and studiously multiplied? A similar question can be raised for numerous folk artefacts,⁶³ but it applies in particular to woodcuts, etchings and

⁵⁸ Sulima, *op. cit.*, 120. On the *signans/signatum* non-differentiation in photography, see D. Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 231–235, 278–279.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, 57.

⁶⁰ Kuryluk, *Veronika and her Cloth*, 113.

⁶¹ *Ib.*

⁶² Theodosius, *De Terra Sancta*, and Antonius the Martyr, *Perambulatio locorum sanctorum*, in *Itinera hierosolymitana et descriptiones terrae sanctae bellis sacris anteriora*, ed. T. Tobler and A. Molinier (Publications de la Société de l’Orient latin: Série géographique 1–2), Geneva 1879, rpt. Osnabrück: Zeller 1966, 89ff., 61ff.

⁶³ And for the magical concept of identity in general—to be observed e.g. in the treatment of the name as the being. Cf. M. Buber’s remarks in this respect: “The ‘true’

lithographs, for which the concepts of the original and a copy lose any significance whatsoever.

Therefore a woodcut print propagates a view according to which truth is tantamount to a magically multiplied repetition, a concept which is utterly incomprehensible for people raised in a culture that venerates the original and holds the copy in contempt. If an image is holy because it represents holy men, it is paradoxically sanctified further when it becomes a print, a copy, a seal, "a stamp of identity." Without recurring to illusionism, and in fact—thanks to its typical schematicity—providing a counterbalance for it, a woodcut print, rather than weakening non-differentiation, paradoxically amplifies it. The print is based on the folk "ontological" criterion of truth as repetition of The Same, that is, *toutes proportions gardées*, the same criterion to which all religious mentality based on iconographic canon aspires. Folk prints imitate in this respect—with the due difference in scale—Byzantine icons and numerous other varieties of religious painting, for example that of Tibetan Buddhism. The canon and the mould, the seal and the measure, the photography and the printing each allow in its own manner to avoid the danger of *eidolon*, or "the false image." They are united by one feature—the automaticity of representation, which frees the copy from the accusation of taking liberties with the original, as it removes any possibility of this occurring. In this degraded manner, the high idea of *acheiropoietos* returns: just as the holy image had its source in the Prototype, the holy print is provided a source in the form of the woodcut matrix, to which all the attributes of the *Urbild* are transferred. It is exactly due to this property that a print becomes most like "a true image" that our remarks focus upon.

The principle of miraculous multiplication make the relation obtaining between the *Bild* and the *Abbild* not one of similarity, but one

name of a person, like that of any other object, is far more than a mere denotative designation for men who think in categories of magic; it is the essence of the person, distilled from his real being, so that he is present in it once again" (*Moses*, Oxford 1946, 51).

of identity.⁶⁴ What is annihilated in the process is the very possibility of false representation: the image (*Bild*) “is endowed” onto prints (*Abbild*), and its sanctity is expanded and reproduced in the form of the prints, which need not be identical visually, yet are manifestations of “the same,” and therefore true. The identity guaranteed by printing is sealed with by the rubbing of the image on the original. What is symptomatic is that the warranty of ontological truth is provided by touch,⁶⁵ or physical contact in general, between the *Bild* and the *Abbild*.⁶⁶

Folk-type culture is by the very nature founded on repetition. *Repetitio* is the only way in this world to turn towards the Beginning, in this “reversed perspective.” In the culture, literal imitation and the multiplication of The Same does not reduce, but rather increases the rank of a thing, by providing it with a certificate of origin, credibility and the sole measure of truthfulness. The uncriticalness typical of the ontological concept of truth is a way of reaching the unreachable, of witnessing in person the archetype—the “non-man-made image” and the “heavenly book.”

⁶⁴ See Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 120, and Dünninger, “Wahres Abbild,” 274–283.

⁶⁵ See legends concerning the blessing bestowed by Christ on His image painted for King Abgar (cf. in this respect the Tibetan legend on the blessing bestowed by Padmasambhava on his “double” (Tib. *Tshab*), in bSam yas: “On seeing the figure in bSam yas Guru Rinpoce said, ‘It looks like me,’ and then blessed it saying, ‘Now it is like me,’” quoted in *Tibetan Calendar 2116: Earth Snake Year 1989–1990 with Buddhist Festivals*, London 1989). See also the life of Simeon the Younger (†592): From the top of his column, the saint thus addresses a certain presbyter, father to three sons: “Take this blessing, the eulogy made of my dust, and when you see the likeness, it is as if you saw us in person.” When one of the presbyter’s sons falls ill and plans to go and visit the saint, his father says: “Saint Simeon, son, has the power of coming here and visiting you; you will get well and you will live.” Thanks to the eulogy the son saw the saint and cried out to his father: “Get up, light up the incense and pray, for Saint Simeon, God’s Servant is here.” (*La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune* [521–592], ed. P. van den Ven, Brussels 1962, 1:205.)

⁶⁶ Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 119–120.

“Exegetes of the Book claim that all books aspire to be the Original. They only live a borrowed life, which at the moment of flight returns to its old source. This means that books get fewer, and the Original gets stronger.” So Bruno Schulz wrote of the paradox of sameness and difference that mystified him.⁶⁷ “True prints” and “letters from heaven” are folk manifestations of the same longing, the aspiration to the status of the Original, which is fulfilled by questioning the very foundations of the possibility of differentiation and non-authenticity. Identity is expanded here in a model manner: through the “seal” (that of a woodcut), the “measure” (that of *longitudo*: “The True Measure of the Body Our Lord, Jesus Christ”) and the “copy” (that of “letters from heaven”⁶⁸ or “chain of luck”)—and it is in those that the significance of folk repetition resides. This is a mentality which brings to mind the amazing way in which *The Zohar* explains the manner in which Identity is multiplied: “Before God created the world, His name was enclosed within Him, and therefore He and His name were not one. Nor could this unity be effected until sealing His seal, He endowed the universe with being and created the world. Having, therefore, decided to do so, He traced [literally: chiselled signs] and built. . .”⁶⁹

In David Freedberg’s exceptional work *Power of Images*, we read that “the study of copies and transformations remains one of the great tasks of the history of images.”⁷⁰ Though all may not be convinced of the significance of that claim, ethnographers have for a long time suspected that repetition, which is “unjustified, haphazard, irrational,

⁶⁷ B. Schulz, “Sanatorium pod Klepsydra,” in his *Proza*, Kraków 1973, 130.

⁶⁸ The following “chain of luck” came to me by mail in November 1998: “Please send 20 copies of this letter, and you will see what happens before 4 days pass. . . Because the copies of this letter must circulate, you must send them to your friends and acquaintances.” On the copy I received, which was clearly one of the required 20, a note is to be found by the anonymous supervisor who ordered copies to be made: “Supervisor’s office, please mail.”

⁶⁹ *Zohar* I, 29a; *The Zohar*, tr. H. Sperling and M. Simon, London and Bournemouth 1949, I, 110–111.

⁷⁰ Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 121.

even nonsensical”⁷¹ from the point of view of traditional metaphysics, may well constitute the *differentia specifica* of folk-type culture. Thanks to the magical repetition represented by the folk “true print,” we gain a possibility of reviewing and maybe also interpreting anew the questions of the *acheiropoietos* and other “high” motives of the elitist culture, which could not reveal their full significance within the restrictions imposed by the Great Division (into the literate and illiterate or high and low tradition). We owe this new perspective in which they can now be placed to the naïve questions on truth and identity posed by folk piousness. As Roland Barthes says, these are questions that belong to the “foolish,” or simple metaphysics (though answers to them are quite complex), that is probably the only true metaphysics.⁷²

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⁷¹ B. Banasiak, “Wstep” in G. Deleuze, *Różnica i powtórzenie* [orig. *Différence et répétition*], tr. P. Banasiak, K. Matuszewski, Warsaw 1997, 8.

⁷² Barthes, *La chambre claire*, §35.

AUX FRONTIÈRES DE L'IRANITÉ: « NĀṢRĀYĒ » ET
« KRĪSTYONĒ » DES INSCRIPTIONS DU MOBĀD KIRDĪR:
ENQUÊTE LITTÉRAIRE ET HISTORIQUE

CHRISTELLE JULLIEN ET FLORENCE JULLIEN

Summary

The identification of the *nāṣrāyē* and the *krīstyonē* in the *mobad* Kirdīr's inscriptions is still disputed. In this contribution the authors make a systematic examination of the Syriac and Mazdaean sources. Each term, situated in its context, can be understood in its literary and historical environment. The consideration of a geostrategic polarity Irān/Anirān enables us to understand these two designations by means of a re-evaluation of the relationship between Christians and Mazdaeans. Political motives, and their conjoined religious implications, explain the Sasanid authorities' use of these two terms to designate Christians.

L'identification des *nāṣrāyē* et des *krīstyonē* mentionnés dans les inscriptions du *mobad* Kirdīr a fait l'objet de diverses hypothèses de recherche, notamment grâce aux travaux de J. de Menasce et de M.-L. Chaumont et, encore récemment, de S.C. Mimouni¹. Sur ces jalons documentaires, nous désirons présenter une nouvelle identification de ces deux groupes au regard des sources syriaques et mazdéennes. Ce travail de mise en contexte n'a jamais fait l'objet d'une étude approfondie ; or, il apporte un éclairage essentiel à chacun des

¹ J. De Menasce, *Une apologétique mazdéenne du IX^e siècle. Škand-Gumānīk Vičār. La solution décisive des doutes* (Collectanea Friburgentia NS 30), Fribourg 1945, 207–209. M.-L. Chaumont, *La christianisation de l'empire iranien* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 499 ; Subsidia 80), Louvain 1988, 111–120, résume commodément l'historiographie de la question. *Id.*, « L'inscription de Kartīr à la “Ka'bah de Zoroastre” (texte, traduction, commentaire) », *Journal Asiatique* 248 (1960) 339–380 ; S.C. Mimouni, « Les Nazoréens. Recherche étymologique et historique », *Revue Biblique* 105 (1998) 232–244.

termes ainsi saisi dans son milieu littéraire et surtout son environnement historique. S'agit-il d'une double appellation synonymique ? Ou chacun des termes recouvre-t-il une appellation liée à un contexte différent ? Cette étude impose nécessairement une appréhension diachronique et une prise en compte de toutes les données de la documentation en milieu iranien et syro-mésopotamien ; ces aspects développés permettront de réévaluer les relations entre chrétiens et mazdéens sous l'angle des rapports sociaux et politiques.

Examen de la documentation mazdéenne

L'inscription moyen-perse de Naqš-i Rostam

Le mage Kirdīr a fait graver sur la pierre quatre inscriptions célébrant son zèle à défendre le mazdéisme face à des minorités religieuses en pleine expansion ; il valorise pourtant une action qui pourrait être moins étendue que ne le prétendent ses affirmations. Parmi ces inscriptions, trois intéressent notre propos en raison des appellations particulières données aux groupes religieux minoritaires de l'empire :

- L'inscription de Sar Mašhad, non loin de la voie achéménide conduisant de Suse à Persépolis, près du bas-relief de Vahrām II ; elle est approximativement datée de 290². Ph. Gignoux a proposé de la considérer comme le texte de base, sur lequel prennent appui les autres compositions. Il allègue à cette hypothèse un argument archéologique et historique : Kirdīr est alors simple *hērbad* sous le règne de Šāpūr I^{er}, perdu dans la hiérarchie des dignitaires du mazdéisme³ ; c'est en tant que grand mage, sous

² Ph. Gignoux, « Étude des variantes textuelles des inscriptions de Kirdīr. Genèse et datation », *Le Muséon* 86 (1973) 214–215.

³ À propos de l'organisation des prêtres zoroastriens provinciaux et de l'institution du *mobaḍān mobad*, cf. Ph. Gignoux, « Titres et fonctions sasanides d'après les sources syriaques hagiographiques », *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 28 (1983) 196–197, 200 ; *id.*, « Church State Relations in the Sasanian Period », dans *Monarchies and Socio-Religious Traditions in the Ancient Near East*, éd. Prince Takahito Mikasa (*Bulletin of the Middle Eastern Culture Centre in Japan* 1), Wies-

Vahrām II, qu'il a pu faire graver des inscriptions personnelles (à moins qu'il ne s'agisse de l'un de ses disciples) en des lieux si sacrés (celui de l'investiture d'Ardašīr I à Naqš-i Rajab ; celui des tombeaux des rois achéménides creusés dans la falaise de Naqš-i Rustam ; à droite de la représentation du triomphe de Šāpūr I^{er} sur le même site). Il profita sans doute de périodes troublées pour imposer par sa très haute position des prétentions quasi royales ; il semble que Vahrām II ait donné son accord pour laisser Kirdīr accéder aux sites royaux et faire graver son effigie aux côtés des souverains sassanides. C'est donc par rétrospection que le *mobad* paraît s'attribuer une action étendue et importante dès le règne de Šāpūr I^{er}.

- L'inscription de la Ka'aba de Zoroastre, en moyen-perse, située au nord de Persépolis, à Naqš-i Rustam ; elle s'insère dans le monument même de Šāpūr I^{er} qui fait mémoire de ses campagnes victorieuses et de ses fondations cultuelles en vis-à-vis des tombeaux des rois achéménides⁴. Il s'agirait donc d'une version remaniée de la longue inscription de Sar Mašhad. Ce texte de la Ka'aba de Zoroastre a fait l'objet de nombreuses critiques et éditions ; parmi les plus récentes, citons en version anglaise celle de D.N. MacKenzie ; pour les quatre inscriptions, nous renvoyons à Ph. Gignoux⁵.

baden 1983, 78. Cette haute fonction (*rēša d-mauhpātē*, « le chef des *mobads* ») n'est pas attestée aux IV^e–V^e siècles alors que ce titre s'affirme au siècle suivant.

⁴ L'inscription figure sur la partie inférieure du mur oriental de l'édifice. Le premier éditeur du texte, et traducteur, fut M. Sprengling, « Kartir Founder of Sassanian Zoroastrianism », *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 57 (1940) 197–228 ; *id.*, *Third Century Iran : Sapor and Kartir*, Chicago 1953, 37–60. Cf. M.-L. Chaumont, « L'inscription de Kartīr » (ci-dessus, n. 1).

⁵ Pour la chronologie des inscriptions de Kirdīr avec la date de 293 comme *terminus post quem*, nous renvoyons aux analyses de Gignoux, « Étude des variantes textuelles » (ci-dessus, n. 2), 193–215 ; *id.*, *Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdīr. Textes et concordances* (*Studia Iranica* 9), Paris 1991, 18–27, 28–29, 40–73 avec translittération du pehlevi. Cf. D.N. McKenzie, *The Sasanian Rock Relief at Naqsh-e Rostam* (*Iranische Denkmäler* I), Berlin 1989, 35–72 ; rectifications par Gignoux,

- À Naqš-i Rostam, l'inscription que Kirdīr fit graver en copie interprétée de Sar Mašhad. Elle se trouve dans l'inscription de victoire de Šāpūr I^{er} sur la droite.

Sans entrer dans le détail, il importe de rappeler très brièvement le contexte d'ensemble ayant présidé au déclenchement de la persécution dont rend compte essentiellement l'inscription de la Ka'aba de Zoroastre. L'édit perceptible sur la stèle de Kirdīr s'effectua sous le règne de Vahrām II, dont on situe l'avènement vers 276. Cette époque coïncide avec l'apogée de la carrière de Kirdīr, qui prend la tête du groupe des mages et obtient la suprématie en matière de justice pour tout l'empire. W. Hinz a détaillé les marques de puissance dont se valorise le personnage, repérables sur les représentations gravées⁶.

Certains documents d'hagiographie témoignent de cette persécution de minorités religieuses à cette époque. Ils commencent par mettre en valeur de manière peu vérifiable l'intérêt du souverain envers le christianisme. Un passage de la *Chronique de Séert* cite le témoignage de Milès de Suse : Vahrām II aurait grandi à « Karkh Djuddan » et y aurait appris quelques rudiments de syriaque, invitant des prêtres à venir échanger sur leurs doctrines⁷. M.-L. Chaumont a proposé la lecture « Karkh-Lédan » dans le Ḥūzistān, en raison du séjour attesté de Milès et de Vahrām en cette région⁸. Sans vouloir rejeter totalement cette tradition, nous pouvons penser que l'extrait indiquerait une certaine connaissance de cette minorité religieuse alors en pleine croissance

Les quatre inscriptions, 24–27. Nous renvoyons au dossier bibliographique établi par E. Kettenhofen, *Die römisch-persischen Kriege des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. nach der Inschrift Šāhpuhrs I. an der Ka'be-ye Zartost (ŠKZ)* (Beiheft zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, no. 55), Wiesbaden 1982.

⁶ W. Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, Berlin 1969, ch. IX, 189–192.

⁷ A. Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite (Chronique de Séert) I/1 », *Patrologia Orientalis* 4, Paris 1907, 237 [27].

⁸ J. Duchesne-Guillemin, « Zoroastrian Religion », dans *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 3/2, Cambridge 1983, réimpr. 1996², 881 ; Chaumont, *La christianisation de l'empire iranien* (ci-dessus, n. 1), 103–105.

par le souverain. La *Chronique* rappelle également le début de la persécution par le même souverain⁹ – édit promulgué une dizaine d'années après son avènement, soit entre 287 et 293, date de la fin de son règne¹⁰ : une confusion entre le clergé et les manichéens pratiquant le célibat « comme le métropolitain et les évêques » (mais sur d'autres critères) étend les recherches aux chrétiens « sans distinction ». D'après la même *Chronique*, Pāpā aurait eu à souffrir en ces temps, élément repris par Mari Ibn Suleyman¹¹. Une délégation de chrétiens introduite auprès du roi éclaircit la situation et opère une mise au point ; la persécution est suspendue à leur rencontre. Selon une homélie copte manichéenne, une accalmie se serait produite vers la fin du règne de Vahrām, autour de 291, pour les manichéens¹². Mais il convient de ne pas majorer l'étendue et l'impact des persécutions subies par les minorités religieuses, que les inscriptions du mage orgueilleux de son œuvre tendent à valoriser.

Au paragraphe 11 de la Ka'aba de Zoroastre, Kirdīr se flatte d'avoir porté « un grand coup et une grande souffrance » à la doctrine d'Ahrimān et des démons, grâce à lui écartée du pays ; par son action énergique, le mage a obtenu des renoncements en la croyance aux *daēvas* :

... en chaque pays, en chaque lieu, dans tout le pays, les services [en l'honneur] d'Ohrmazd et des dieux devinrent plus importants, et la religion mazdéenne et les mages eurent un grand rang dans le pays ; aux dieux, à l'eau, au feu et au bétail, il advint une grande satisfaction ; (...) la doctrine d'Ahrimān et des démons fut écartée du pays et cessa d'être une croyance, et les *yhwdy* juifs, les *šmny* chamanes (bouddhistes) et les *blmny* brahmanes, et les *n'čl'y* nazaréens et les *klstydy'n* chrétiens et les *mktky* et les *zndyky* manichéens furent frappés dans le

⁹ Scher, *op. cit.*, 237 [27]–239 [29].

¹⁰ R.N. Frye, « The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians », dans *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 3/1, 127–128.

¹¹ H. Gismondi, *Maris, Amri et Slibae. De patriarchis nestorianorum commentaria*, Pars Prior, Rome 1899, 8, trad. 8–9.

¹² H.-J. Polotsky, *Manichäische Homilien III (Manichäische Handschriften der Sammlung A. Chester Beatty 1)*, Stuttgart 1934, 76.

pays, et les idoles détruites, et le repère des démons anéanti ; il devint le lieu et le siège des dieux (§11)¹³

Les identifications proposées pour chaque groupe religieux sont désormais acquises pour les derniers nommés (manichéens)¹⁴ et les trois premiers (juifs ; moines orientaux mendiants et itinérants, du sanscrit *śramana* ; Hindous¹⁵). Il peut paraître étonnant de voir placer les *zndyky* en dernier lieu compte-tenu du danger majeur qu'ils représentent pour le mazdéisme ; pourtant le paradoxe apparent s'éclaire si l'on considère cette énumération dans un sens de menace religieuse progressive¹⁶. Pour W. Sundermann, le terme *mktky* correspondrait à une

¹³ Gignoux, *Les quatre inscriptions*, 69–70 ; McKenzie, *The Sasanian Rock Relief*, 58 (ci-dessus, n. 5).

¹⁴ *zndyky*, littéralement « ceux qui s'occupent du Zand ». Cf. H. Bailey cité par Duchesne-Guillemin, « Zoroastrian Religion » (ci-dessus, n. 8), 907–908, Appendix. À propos du terme *zandik* voir, avec réserve, M.H. Dodgeon et S.N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier in the Persian Wars (A.D. 226–363) : A Documentary History*, Londres et New York 1991, Appendice 3, 335.

¹⁵ Sarmanes et Brahmanes sont évoqués au quinzième chapitre des *Stromates* I de Clément d'Alexandrie parmi les sages du paganisme : C. Mondésert et M. Caster, *Clément d'Alexandrie. Les Stromates I (Sources Chrétiennes 30)*, Paris 1951, 102 : XV, 71, 4.

¹⁶ Le message de Māni, notamment dans le *Shābuhragān*, se présente comme un prolongement de l'élan zoroastrien (même s'il reste encore beaucoup d'inconnues sur l'influence éventuelle d'éléments de la religion officielle sur la pensée du prophète). Lors de son entrevue avec Māni, il est possible que Šāpūr I^{er} ait accueilli en lui un réformateur de la religion officielle. Mais le clergé mazdéen ne s'y trompa pas. Il y reconnut une tentative de variante dangereuse du zoroastrisme. Dans ses inscriptions à la louange de son œuvre, Kirdīr se vante ainsi d'avoir sauvegardé la pureté de la religion officielle ; mise en parallèle avec l'œuvre de Šāpūr, victorieux de Valérien, célébrée à Naqš-i Rostam, l'action de Kirdīr prend un sens plus profond : comme son prince sur un plan politique, il sut évincer la grande menace pour la société et la religion iranienne ; P.O. Skjærvø, « Counter-Manichean Elements in Kirdir's Inscriptions. Irano-Manichaica II », dans L. Cirillo et A. van Tongerloo (éd.), *Atti del terzo congresso internazionale di studi "manicheismo e oriente cristiano antico"*. Arcavacata di Rende-Amantea, 31 agosto – 5 settembre 1993, Louvain et Naples 1997, 313–342. Cf. M. Hutter, « Manichaeism in the Early Sasanian Empire », *Numen* 40 (1993) 2–15. Cf. aussi Gignoux, « Contacts culturels entre Manichéisme et

simplification du syriaque *mnaqqdē* désignant des baptistes chez Théodore bar Konai¹⁷. Contre cette étymologie qui ne paraît guère plausible pour certains critiques, H.W. Bailey interprète ce nom à partir d'une racine *mak-*, « laver », « plonger », « rendre humide » (v. *mkrtē*, « se laver », « baptiser » bien attesté en arménien)¹⁸. Ph. Gignoux approuve la vraisemblance de cette étymologie, expliquant par ailleurs le terme moyen-perse *makog*, « barque », « coupe [à vin] » par cette même racine *maq-*, « plonger »¹⁹. Dans l'inscription, le mouvement baptiste serait donc considéré *in se*, rassemblant vraisemblablement plusieurs groupements marqués par une même spiritualité sous une dénomination similaire²⁰. Notons l'emplacement significatif de ce groupe dans

Mazdéisme : quelques exemples significatifs », *L'ancien Proche-Orient et les Indes : Parallélismes interculturels religieux* (Studia Orientalia 70), Helsinki 1993, 65–73.

¹⁷ W. Sundermann, « Parthisch 'BSWDG'N 'Die Täufer' », *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 25 (1977) 238–240. M. Back avait proposé d'y voir les jaïns de l'Inde, mais son hypothèse ne fait pas l'unanimité (*Die Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften. Studien zur Orthographie und Phonologie des Mittelpersischen der Inschriften* (Acta Iranica 18), Téhéran et Liège 1978, 415). La critique s'accorde en général pour associer ce terme avec le champ sémantique aquatique, comprenant les baptistes ou les mandéens, cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, « Zoroastrian Religion » (ci-dessus, n. 8), 882–883, les *zandīq* désignant pour lui des hérétiques au sens plus large, par rapport à la religion officielle ; dans cette perspective, les manichéens pourraient être considérés comme tels.

¹⁸ H.W. Bailey, « Iranian *MKTK-*, Armenian *MKRTM-* », *Revue des Études Arméniennes* NS 14 (1980) 8–10.

¹⁹ Ph. Gignoux, « Noms d'ustensiles (argenterie et poterie) en Moyen-Iranien », dans *Documents et archives provenant de l'Asie centrale. Actes du colloque franco-japonnais, Kyoto 4–8 oct. 1988*, éd. A. Haneda, Kyoto 1990, 71–86 ; *id.*, *Les quatre inscriptions*, 69–70. Cf. D. McKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, Londres 1971, 53 : *makō(k)*, « bateau ».

²⁰ En les désignant, Kirdīr manifeste sa connaissance des minorités religieuses en territoire iranien : les manichéens apparaîtraient dans l'inscription de manière spécifique, sans assimilation aucune avec les chrétiens (comme ce fut le cas lors des persécutions ultérieures). La *Chronique de Séert* rappelle ces confusions épisodiques de la part des autorités officielles perses, auxquelles les chrétiens mirent bon ordre : Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite » (ci-dessus, n. 7), 237 [27]–239 [29].

l'énumération de Kirdīr : les mouvements baptistes connus en Iran sont christianisants ; les *mktky* suivent la catégorie désignant spécifiquement les chrétiens et précèdent immédiatement les manichéens – ces *mktky* prendraient ainsi un certain relief en tant que substrat de recrutement privilégié de Māni. Mais l'une des questions centrales pour notre compréhension du christianisme en territoire iranien est attachée à la juxtaposition des deux substantifs *klstydy'n* et *n'čl'y*. Comment la comprendre ? S'agit-il d'une même communauté au sujet de laquelle les autorités zoroastriennes auraient relevé une particularité d'opposition ou de distinction ? Devons-nous les entendre comme deux références chrétiennes ?

Le fragment P 8823

En dehors des inscriptions de Kirdīr, la mention de « nazaréens » ne semblait pas attestée en contexte zoroastrien. Or, une inscription sur parchemin est rarement prise en considération dans les études antérieures, alors qu'elle présente explicitement cette dénomination et exclut de ce fait la considération de *n'čl'y* comme un *hapax* dans la littérature mazdéenne.

Il s'agit d'un fragment de parchemin écrit recto verso en moyen perse, coté P 8823, déposé au musée de Berlin. Ce document de 175 × 135 mm, daté de l'époque de Khosrau II par O. Hansen, a conservé une marge à droite et à gauche. Les deux faces sont indépendantes quant au contenu et au style : la première se présente comme une liste de noms, au verso se trouve une attestation de livraison marchande au nom d'un certain Anāhīd-Khrad. La plus grande partie des neuf lignes de la face recto reste lisible et c'est là que se trouve la mention qui nous intéresse²¹.

1 *bwrčhwsrwy'n y*

2 *prhwbwt'n nčwryk'*

²¹ O. Hansen, *Die Mittelpersischen Papyri der Papyrussammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 9)*, Berlin 1938, 1–102 ; en particulier au numéro 54, 76–81.

- 3 y d'ṭ'whrmzd'n
 4 nywhwsrwy y
 5 pr'ymrtbwṭ'n
 6 ṛsyk' y twrk'n
 7 m'hwnd't y
 8 m'hd'tgwšn[sp
 9]r[].^[22]

La ligne 2 comporte le mot *nčwryk'* ; la première lettre un peu effacée a été restituée par l'éditeur qui tint compte de la longueur de l'inter-espace, excluant un *w* «et» pour des raisons de vraisemblance de lecture : chaque nom est présenté avec sa filiation paternelle. Les deux premiers (*bwrčhwsrwy'n* y *prhwbwṭ'n*, l. 1–2) représentent donc un seul personnage. O. Hansen, qui publia le fragment, souligne en une remarque intéressante que le *č* s'expliquerait par une dérivation du syriaque *nšry'*, *nāšrāyō*, donc par une provenance syrienne et non pas moyen-perse, dont les règles orthographiques exigeraient un *s* (*nasūrīk* ou *nasūr[ā]īk* ?). Il fait remarquer que le personnage serait ici désigné par son appartenance religieuse minoritaire : ce serait comme chrétien (nazaréen) qu'il serait mentionné par le document d'origine iranienne, qui rappelle ainsi le statut religieux étranger du fils de *d'ṭ'whrmzd'n* (Dād-Ohrmezdān, l. 3). Cette différence était-elle assez significative pour qu'un mazdéen la mentionne et la spécifie sur un acte officiel ? Elle pouvait être comprise par toutes les parties en présence (des iraniens), impliquant une réprobation sociale implicite. Le nom nazaréen apparaît comme un appellatif d'origine syrienne et non-mazdéenne, c'est-à-dire dans ce cas précis non-iranienne.

Les noms des quatre hommes figurant avec lui restent difficiles à identifier. Cette succession suggère une liste de recrutement ; l'éditeur du texte était d'avis d'y voir un recensement d'ouvriers embauchés à des fins commerciales pour un même travail.

²² P 8823r ; Hansen, *op. cit.*, 77.

Ce document fragmentaire impose des précautions de lecture. Le contexte (liste de noms propres) inviterait peut-être à y voir plus prudemment un nom personnel iranien. Les éléments font défaut pour éclaircir le problème.

Une attention renouvelée aux sources apporterait-elle un éclairage particulier quant à notre perception de ces deux minorités, *klstydn* et *nʾlʾy*? En insistant sur les différents niveaux de lecture – et donc d’interprétation – réalisés par les rédacteurs, sur le regard porté par les personnages en présence (regard des mazdéens sur le groupe des chrétiens ; celui des chrétiens sur eux-mêmes, etc.), sur celui des lecteurs et auditeurs de cette littérature pour l’essentiel hagiographique, se dégagent une définition plus précise du “chrétien” (au sens large du terme) et une meilleure connaissance de la réalité du christianisme dans l’empire iranien.

Examen de la documentation syriaque

Un examen minutieux et attentif des principales sources chrétiennes littéraires syriaques sur le long terme permettra d’évaluer la pénétration terminologique de ces deux noms en Iran ; l’écho d’un usage très ancré dans le vocabulaire du début du IV^e siècle pourrait en effet être signifiant pour une période antérieure, et permettrait de comprendre les mécanismes de transmission et de répercussion. Cette analyse imposera des nuances internes en ce qui concerne la désignation du groupe des chrétiens. Cette documentation, encore inexplorée en cette direction, contribuera à mieux saisir le contexte d’insertion de chacun des termes considérés. Un premier constat se dégage : les deux appellations *nāṣrāyō/krīstyōnō* se côtoient mais apparaissent chacune dans un sens propre et bien défini.

Dans les textes hagiographiques, nous retrouvons cette ambivalence. D’une manière générale, c’est le mot *krīstyōnō* qui prédomine, le plus souvent sans équivalent avec une autre catégorie chrétienne. Ainsi, l’*Histoire de Mār Abdalmessiḥ*, celle de *Mār Yonas*, le *Martyre de Baboï*, l’*Histoire du martyr de saint Georges* ou la *vie de Rabban*

Mār Sabah offrent au lecteur cette graphie exclusive pour les chrétiens de l'empire iranien²³.

Toutefois, des nuances internes sont bien repérables, permettant de dégager le champ sémantique de chaque désignation. Notons-le bien, il s'agit essentiellement de textes syriaques évoquant des faits censés se dérouler dans l'empire iranien. Ainsi, dans le *Martyre d'Isaac et Šābūr*²⁴, publié pour la première fois dans un catalogue des martyrs du Bēth-Garmaï par E. Assemani : le roitelet d'Adiabène du nom d'Ardašīr persécute, avec le *mobaḏ* local Adargušnasp, des membres du clergé. Le texte situe leur mort aux alentours de 343. Lors de la seconde persécution de Šāpūr II, le roi fait un jour comparaître ses Grands pour leur demander s'ils connaissent les *nāšrāyē* Isaac et Šābūr originaires de Ctésiphon²⁵. Les miracles accomplis par ces deux évêques avaient suscité des conversions parmi les habitants des régions alentours qui avaient reconnu le nom de « Jésus qu'on appelle le Nazaréen »²⁶.

Au niveau du rédacteur, lorsque le style indirect et narratif prévaut, le terme *krīstyonō* est choisi²⁷. Ainsi la dernière ligne du récit décrit l'action de coreligionnaires des deux martyrs venus soustraire les corps

²³ Quelques exemples de citations du mot *krīstyonō* dans un contexte similaire de désignation générale :

pour l'*Histoire de Mār Abdalmessiḥ* (*Acta martyrum et sanctorum* I, éd. P. Bedjan, [Paris 1890], 173–202), 174, 1.4.8.15.16 ; 176, 6.17.20 ; 177, 20 ; 178, 17 ; 185, 7 ; 192, 2 ;

pour l'*Histoire de Mār Yonas* (*ibid.* 466–525), 516, 14 ;

le *Martyre de Baboï* (*ibid.* 632–635), 632, 2.10 ; 633, 20 ; 634, 3 ;

le *Martyre de Saint Georges* (*ibid.* 277–300, et *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis* 312–313), 277, 4 ; 279 ; 280, 18 ; 290, 3 ; 297, 15 ;

la vie de *Rabban Mār Sabah* (*ibid.* 636–650), 636, 12 ; 637, 1–2 ; 648, 16 ; 649, 4 ;

cf. aussi *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II (Paris 1890), 39, 4 ; 40, 14 ; 248, 4 ; 253, 5 ; 255, 14 ; 315, 2 ; 349, 7, etc.

²⁴ *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II, 51–56. Vie tirée de la publication de E. Assemani et corrigée à partir d'un manuscrit de J.-B. Abbeloos.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52, 18 ; cf. 55 où les chrétiens sont désignés sous ce terme par les Perses.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 53, 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55, 5.

aux prédateurs et leur donner une sépulture décente²⁸. L'utilisation du terme *krīstyonō* prend ici une valeur communautaire plus large : au-delà de quelques démarches individuelles, c'est toute l'Église qu'ils représentent dans un proto-culte autour de reliques. De manière similaire, nous retrouvons le même geste honorifique et représentatif de l'Église au sens large dans l'*Histoire de Yazdīn, d'Adorhormizd, d'Anahid sa fille et de Mār Pethion* : des *krīstyonē* emportent les restes des membres torturés des saints²⁹.

Ce récit (*Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis* 923–924) se rapporte à la neuvième année de Yazdegerd II (août 446–447) ; le 25 de Tešrī I, calculé par J.M. Fiey au 25 octobre 446, se déroula la passion de Pethion³⁰. Ce texte est particulièrement significatif puisqu'il privilégie toujours le terme *nāšrāyō* dans un contexte *spécifique* : l'intervention des mages persécuteurs, qui se réalise à partir d'une accusation aboutissant à la condamnation des nazaréens. Ce terme est donc utilisé par les détracteurs de la religion chrétienne. Au cours des interrogatoires successifs et des séances de tortures, Pethion est enjoint à laisser « le Dieu des nazaréens »³¹.

La fille d'Adorhormizd, un dignitaire de l'empire converti du zoroastrisme par le saint, subit un interrogatoire similaire : un mage la somme de renier son statut de nazoréenne afin d'être libérée de prison ; il propose de la conduire au lieu de réunion des nazoréens³².

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 56, 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 628, 8.

³⁰ J.M. Fiey, *Mossoul chrétienne. Essai sur l'histoire, l'archéologie et l'état actuel des monuments chrétiens de la ville de Mossoul (Recherches publiées sous la dir. de l'Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth 12)*, Beyrouth 1963, 219–220. Cf. P. Devos, « Sainte Sirin, martyre sous Khosrau I^{er} Anosarvan », *Analecta Bollandiana* 64 (1946) 87–131 ; *id.*, « Bulletin », *ibid.* 79 (1961) 219–221. Cf. *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II, 559–631.

³¹ *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II, 615, 12 ; 622, 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 594, 9.12–14 ; cf. 589, 20 ; 590, 1 ; 584, 8 ; 576, 5–6 : « [Le mage] : dis seulement : 'je ne suis pas nazaréenne', et moi, je te délivrerai. Je te conduirai vers un lieu des nazaréens » (là où est enseignée la doctrine chrétienne).

L'usage de *krīstyonō* intervient dans un sens beaucoup plus large, lorsque le rédacteur expose son sujet en début de chapitre par exemple : Pethion y est *leader des krīstyonē*³³, ou bien le serviteur du « Dieu des chrétiens »³⁴.

Le *mobad* s'adressant individuellement au « nazaréen » Mār Pethion, souhaite devant lui anéantir sa religion. Dans cette perspective, c'est le mot *krīstyonūthō*³⁵ qui est employé, par référence à l'universalité doctrinale, par le biais du rapport de l'auteur.

Durant les dernières années de persécution de Šāpūr II, l'*Histoire de Ya'qūb*³⁶ met en scène les chrétiens poursuivis par les autorités civiles et religieuses mazdéennes dans le Bēth-Garmaï. Les autochtones non-chrétiens zoroastriens les appellent *nāšrāyē*, multipliant contre eux les critiques, les calomnies et les plaintes³⁷. Le texte ne porte *krīstyonē/krīstyonūthō* que dans les explications et les séquences narratives sous l'autorité de l'auteur, et selon une orientation élargie. Ainsi, à un nouveau converti désireux d'embrasser la foi chrétienne (*krīstyonūthō*), Mār Ya'qūb, son maître, répond par un adage de sagesse universelle en reprenant la même terminologie³⁸.

Les *Actes* syriaques du martyre de Qandidā (ms. Add. 12142, fol. 104^r–107^v) suivent le même schéma. La victime « appartenait à ceux qui avaient été déportés du pays des Romains » d'après la *Chronique de Séert*³⁹, élevée par ses parents dans la religion chrétienne ; elle se

³³ *Ibid.*, 604, 8.12.18. À deux reprises, très sporadiquement, *nāšrāyō* apparaît comme une auto-désignation dans la bouche de Pethion, *ibid.*, 610, 2–4 ; 620, 17 : mais c'est toujours par référence à un petit groupe dont il est le chef et qu'il entend protéger face aux mazdéens présents qui l'interrogent. L'auteur insiste de ce fait sur l'usage exclusif du terme *nāšrāyō* chez les accusateurs mazdéens, vocabulaire que reprend Pethion pour se faire comprendre ; d'ailleurs, le terme *krīstyonō* est toujours absent des discours directs des juges contradicteurs zoroastriens.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 608, 13.15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 579, 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 562–577.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 576, 5–6, 11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 563, 2.10 ; cf. 567, 4 ; 575, 3.

³⁹ Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite » (ci-dessus, n. 7), 237 [27].

présente comme telle : le texte privilégie toujours le terme *krīstyonūthō* en ce qui la concerne (§§3 et 5)⁴⁰. Le terme *krīstyonō*, « chrétien », prévaut partout, compte-tenu en particulier de la provenance occidentale précisée.

L'*Histoire de Mār Qardag* permet également, dans une continuité, de préciser les emplois de chaque mot considéré. J.-B. Abbeloos édita le texte largement légendaire en 1890 dans les *Analecta Bollandiana*, avec une traduction latine ; P. Bedjan, un an plus tard, proposa une nouvelle édition du texte syriaque⁴¹. Le martyre serait daté de 358, la quarante-neuvième année du règne de Šāpūr⁴². Ce récit insiste sur l'appartenance à un corps national, soulignant que l'iranité (phénomène culturel et politique) impose nécessairement une manifestation de loyalisme. La conversion va à l'encontre de cette vision imposée par les souverains sassanides à leurs sujets. Qardag est dynaste d'Adiabène, commandant des marches d'Assyrie⁴³ ; flattant le sentiment d'hostilité à l'égard de Šāpūr II de la population chrétienne,

⁴⁰ Pour l'étude et la traduction des *Actes* de la martyre : S.P. Brock, « A Martyr at the Sasanian Court under Vahrām II. Candida », *Analecta Bollandiana* 96 (1978) 167–181 ; 173 trad. 178 ; le traducteur signale la commémoration de Qandīdā dans les *Passions* occidentales des martyrs de Nicomédie en Bithynie – indice quant à l'origine familiale de Qandīdā ? Le martyrologe syriaque 12150, de 411, ne conserve pourtant que le nom de la martyre au 7 février, seule. F. Nau, « Résumé de monographies syriaques », *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 20 (1915–1917) 23–24. M.-L. Chaumont restitue cette argumentation coélé-syrienne (*La christianisation de l'empire iranien* (ci-dessus, n. 1), 109). Ces auteurs insistent sur la valeur documentaire de ces *Actes* qui attestent la première persécution organisée et officielle contre les éléments chrétiens de l'empire iranien.

⁴¹ J.-B. Abbeloos, « Acta Mar Kardaghi », *Analecta Bollandiana* 9 (1890) 11–103 ; *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II, 442–506.

⁴² J.S. Assemani rappelle la permanence et la diffusion de ces *Actes* en monde syriaque ; on les retrouve en particulier chez Thomas de Marga et Timothée I^{er} (*Bibliotheca orientalis*, III/1, Rome 1725, 162). Cf. G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer*, Leipzig 1886, 238.

⁴³ *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis* 555–556. Cf. P. Peeters, « Le 'Passionnaire d'Adiabène' », *Analecta Bollandiana* 43 (1925) 301–302. Texte et traduction : Abbeloos, « Acta Mar Kardaghi », *op. cit.*, 11–103.

nombreuse dans la région, il se rebelle contre le roi des rois. Son éphémère succès fit néanmoins sa renommée auprès des communautés chrétiennes de l'Église de Perse qui l'honora tout spécialement. L'exemple est intéressant puisqu'il associe une révolte ouverte suscitée par des iraniens à la profession d'une foi considérée elle aussi, par les autorités civiles, comme un motif de condamnation (d'autant plus que Qardag avait renoncé à la religion mazdéenne).

Là encore, si *krīstyonō* est le mot préférentiel du narrateur, l'usage de *nāšrāyō* s'applique comme dans les autres textes à des cas bien précis. Alors que l'expression « le Dieu des chrétiens (*krīstyonē*) » apparaît comme une reconnaissance universelle de la part de jeunes convertis⁴⁴, *nāšrāyō* est un terme souvent accusateur des ennemis et des dénonciateurs⁴⁵. Pour un zoroastrien, se faire nazaréen est une insulte aux traditions nationales. Qardag, nazaréen, se voit reprocher ses largesses aux pauvres, prises sur les biens gagnés dans le pays : « Tu ne peux distribuer les œuvres de la maison du feu aux nazaréens »⁴⁶.

Devant le roi, le chef des *mobads* accuse Qardag de trahison puisqu'ayant accepté la religion nazaréenne, il détruit les pyrées et accroît le nombre des chrétiens convertis de la religion traditionnelle⁴⁷. Ici, c'est le terme *nāšrāyō* qui est encore utilisé (68, 13), ainsi qu'en 69, 13, où la "superstition" nazaréenne est dénoncée (70, 2–3) à cause de l'action rayonnante de Qardag ; les mages accusent : il faut considérer que si tout le peuple se fait nazaréen, ce serait une atteinte au roi, garant des traditions religieuses de l'empire⁴⁸. *Nāšrāyō* prévaut tout au long du texte narrant les interrogatoires et le procès, dans une perspective de condamnation et d'accusation religieuses⁴⁹. *Krīstyonō*, en revanche, est rarement usité dans ce contexte, si ce n'est pour dési-

⁴⁴ *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II, 34, 10 ; 35, 2.6 ; 78, 12–13 et 95, 13–96, 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 68, 11.13 ; 69, 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 52, 11–14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 68, 10–13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69, 12–13.

⁴⁹ Cf. encore *ibid.*, 73, 9–11 ; 76, 3–4.6–7 ; 87, 11–12.

gner la religion chrétienne : le nouveau converti intègre une religion spécifique, le christianisme⁵⁰.

Fils de déportés, Phusik/Posi s'installe à Karkā d-Lédan. Promu à la fonction de *qiroughbedh*, préfet général des artisans royaux de l'empire, c'est lors d'un déplacement professionnel à Šād-i Šāpūr qu'il rejoindra de lui-même un convoi de coreligionnaires arrêtés pour leur foi. La narration de son martyre, le 18 avril 341 (*Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis* 993), propose le même choix de vocabulaire : la référence aux chrétiens en tant que *nāṣrāyē* intervient systématiquement dans un cadre public de condamnations où les mages (parfois les Grands) ont un rôle actif⁵¹. Les mages reprochent à leurs victimes de disséminer leurs ouvrages (les évangiles) parmi les populations, ouvrages qu'ils appellent péjorativement « écrits des *nāṣrāyē* »⁵². Le terme *krīstyonō* n'est usité qu'à certains moments de l'audience, lorsque le roi s'interroge sur le sens des croyances de Posi, ne sachant ce qu'est un « chrétien »⁵³. L'emploi de *krīstyonō* est une marque identitaire forte. Dans ce texte, le protagoniste ne s'auto-désigne jamais par le nom de *nāṣrāyō*⁵⁴, et ce terme porte une connotation très négative chez les détracteurs.

La *Chronique de Séert* rapporte l'histoire de Yonān, anachorète d'Anbar, disciple de Mār Awgīn, qu'elle situe sous Šāpūr II. Ayant accompli des prodiges et des miracles, les deux saints sont convoqués par le roi ; s'engage alors une discussion avec les mages. Le souverain arbitre en organisant une ordalie : il ordonne à ses prêtres de pénétrer dans un brasier à l'instar des deux « nazaréens » qui en sont sortis indemnes⁵⁵. Notons toutefois que la *Chronique* appelle toujours les chrétiens *naṣārā*, selon la terminologie arabe classique. Néanmoins, ce récit est conservé dans un texte antérieur en syriaque édité par

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 78, 12–13.

⁵¹ *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II, 208–232 ; cf. 215, 22 ; 216, 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 216, 4.11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 220, 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 214, 8.11 et 216, 11 : *krīstyonō enō* « je suis chrétien ».

⁵⁵ Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite » (ci-dessus, n. 7), 246 [134]–248 [136].

P. Bedjan dans les *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* (I, 466–525). C'est le terme « nazaréen » qui est prononcé par Šāpūr pour désigner les étrangers à sa foi (cf. 516–518).

La *Passion de Jacques le Notaire* (*Acta martyrum et sanctorum* IV, 189–201) se situe sous Vahrām V. Originaire de Karkā d-Ersa (d-Lédan ?), Jacques fut emprisonné pour sa foi avec quinze compagnons, et condamné à des travaux pénibles. Mihr-Šāpūr, chef des mages, « grand ennemi des chrétiens », met en œuvre durant une semaine maintes tortures pour les conduire à l'apostasie ; le temps écoulé, il fait mander le gardien et lui demande où en sont « ces misérables nazaréens ». Dans ce récit, l'appellation « nazaréens » se réfère donc au groupe des seize condamnés ; elle est utilisée par le mage, soucieux d'appréhender un noyau chrétien précis sur un territoire iranien placé sous son autorité religieuse. Jacques, d'ailleurs lui-même d'origine romaine, est associé au groupe de ses coreligionnaires iraniens ; la dénomination est donc explicitement attribuée à ces chrétiens sujets du roi⁵⁶.

Dans cette perspective de choix terminologique spécifique chez les détracteurs, signalons notamment l'emploi du terme *nāšroyūthō* pour désigner la religion poursuivie par les mazdéens de l'*Histoire syriaque de Julien l'Apostat*⁵⁷.

L'*Histoire d'Arménie* d'Élisée Vartabed, datée du VI^e siècle, met en scène au chapitre deuxième les mauvais traitements subis par les chrétiens sous le règne de Yazdegerd II roi des Perses. Les mages les attaquent dans une ordonnance de Mihr-Nerseh, gouverneur de la Grande Arménie, au nom du roi. L'édit met en garde les zoroastriens contre « tout homme qui habite sous le ciel et ne suit pas la religion du mazdéisme, [qui] est sourd, aveugle et trompé par les *dēv* d'Ahrimān ».

⁵⁶ Cf. également J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse*, Paris 1904, 113–117 ; A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les sassanides*, Copenhague 1936, 306.

⁵⁷ G. Hoffmann, *Syrischen Erzählungen*, Leiden 1880, 146, 4. Lorsque l'empereur Julien interdira aux chrétiens l'enseignement dans les écoles classiques, il les renverra « dans leurs églises de nazaréens ». Cf. A. Ducellier, *Les Byzantins. Histoire et culture*, Paris 1988, 198.

Après les zurvanistes (mouvement dissident du zoroastrisme) sont dénoncés les chrétiens. Le texte a conservé la polarité textuelle entre les *krīstyonē*, « chrétiens »⁵⁸ et les nazaréens présentés comme *aradschnort*, supérieurs spirituels, trompeurs : « Ne vous fiez pas à vos supérieurs spirituels (*aradschnort*) que vous nommez nazaréens, car ils sont trompeurs »⁵⁹.

S.C. Mimouni a rapproché, quoique de fort loin, ce mot de l'un des sens de la racine syriaque *nšr* « glorifier »⁶⁰. Mais un regard attentif permet de retrouver notre problématique de différenciation : l'édit fait allusion au « pays des Grecs » (empire romain oriental) qui, en embrassant le christianisme, devait être l'objet du mépris des zoroastriens. La conversion d'Arméniens dans le « pays des Grecs » est une grave erreur contre laquelle les mages mettent en garde les habitants de leur propre terre qui auraient tendance à accepter

⁵⁸ V. Langlois, *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie* II, Paris 1869, 190–191.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 191b. Il n'est peut-être pas inintéressant de comparer cette perception avec certaines positions mandéennes dont se feront l'écho bien plus tard les textes sacrés du groupe baptiste, et que restitue E.S. Drower. Dans son étude ethno-religieuse de la gnose nazoréenne publiée à Oxford en 1960, elle distingue les nazoréens des mandéens ou gnostiques. Dans la première catégorie se trouvent les initiés, ceux qui possèdent le secret ; quand un homme accède à la prêtrise, il quitte ainsi les *mandayyāyē* ; il ne sera *nāšurāyō* que s'il observe parfaitement les règles de stricte pureté et atteint la doctrine secrète (*nāšīrūto*, la vraie illumination) (*The Secret Adam : A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis*, Oxford 1960, IX). L'auteur met en rapport cet office avec l'interprétation des astres et des augures, *id.*, *The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran : Their Cults, Customs, Magic, Legends and Folklore*, Oxford 1937, 4, et souligne les échos judaïques de telles dénominations (Is XLVIII, 6 ; LXV, 4 « choses secrètes », « endroits secrets »). C'est dans la même perspective que pourrait s'inscrire une notice de Bar Konaï : à propos d'un cantique qu'il intitule « compréhension (?) des magiciennes », l'auteur explicite quelques points de doctrine que les membres du groupe gardaient secrets. À noter que la confusion, en particulier chez les auteurs arabes, des mandéens avec les mages peut éclairer l'acception des *nāšrāyē* dans le sens d'une révélation de mystères et d'une initiation religieuse, H.-C. Puech, « Le Mandéisme », dans A. Quillet (éd.), *Histoire générale des religions*, Paris 1945, 65 n. 1 ; Drower, *Mandaean*, 3.

⁶⁰ « Les Nazoréens » (ci-dessus, n. 1), 226–227.

la nouvelle doctrine. C'est alors qu'apparaît le terme « nazaréen », ainsi appliqué à la situation interne du pays sous juridiction *perse*. Il est probable que sous ce nom soient désignés les missionnaires et chrétiens engagés, « spirituels » répandant la nouvelle religion et que les sujets du roi de Perse suivraient volontiers. La réponse des évêques à cette ordonnance, au nom et avec le consentement de « toute la multitude [du peuple] du pays »⁶¹, indique bien la démarche de toute une assemblée de croyants menacée dans sa foi. Elle salue en Mihr-Narseh le « grand intendant des *arik* et des *anarik* » en ayant soin de le placer, lui et ses officiers, au « haut rang des *arik* ». C'est dire que le problème religieux s'exprime en termes d'appartenance politique : les nazaréens sont les représentants de l'empire rival christianisé. Il est vraisemblable qu'Élisée utilise une terminologie courante en milieu mazdéen et appliquée à dessein dans cet édit qu'il recompose. Soulignons-le d'autre part, la polarité chrétiens/nazaréens joue encore dans une perspective déjà observée : « chrétien » reste le qualificatif général et universaliste appliqué, en particulier, par le narrateur ; « nazaréen » intervient exclusivement dans un contexte de polémique religieuse sur fond politique et géographiquement circonscrit.

Parmi les récits offrant cette bipolarité nominale, les *Actes de Siméon Bar Sabba'e* sont sans nul doute les plus caractéristiques⁶². Ils furent rédigés peu de temps après le décès du primat survenu en 344. Le terme *krīstyōnō* jalonne le récit, tandis que le choix ponctuel du mot *nāṣrāyō* répond à des critères spécifiques marquant une intention

⁶¹ Langlois, *op. cit.*, 191–192.

⁶² M. Kmosko, « Narratio de beato Simeone Bar Sabba'e », *Patrologia Syriaca* 1/2, Turnhout 1907, 661–1054. G. Wiessner montre les différences structurelles des récits de la *Passion* de Siméon, distinguant la forme courte (A) de la forme longue (B). Ces deux récits renverraient à une source commune qui compilerait elle-même deux autres documents primitifs : l'un ayant trait au refus de Siméon de lever la double capitulation ; le second, surajouté, centré sur le grief des juifs contre le primat, l'accusant de complicité avec l'ennemi romain. Pour les détails concernant ces sources, G. Wiessner, *Untersuchungen zur syrischen Literaturgeschichte I : Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung aus der Christenverfolgung Schapurs II (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse 67)*, Göttingen 1967, 81–83.

précise de la part de l'auteur. Accusé parce qu'il refusait de percevoir une double imposition de ses ouailles, Siméon est arrêté sur ordre royal en tant que représentant de sa communauté. Sous la terminologie 'mō d-nāṣrāyē, c'est le groupe nazaréen qui est ainsi désigné ; Siméon est présenté comme chef des nazaréens dans la lettre de persécution adressée à la région du Hūzistān⁶³. C'est également dans ce contexte de tensions politico-religieuses que le roi, désireux de soumettre les chrétiens aux lois perses, appelle ainsi le primat (*rišō d-nāṣrāyē*, « chef des nazaréens »⁶⁴), reconnaissant en lui le serviteur des nazaréens⁶⁵. L'appellation *nāṣrāyō* est donc intentionnelle : ce terme désigne un groupe local dont Siméon est responsable (en l'occurrence la communauté de Séleucie-Ctésiphon), et identifie des rebelles (non désirables) à l'ordre social. Les locutions courantes « roi des chrétiens » (786, 21), « tous les chrétiens » (792, 1), « tout le peuple des chrétiens » (*l'mō d-krīstyonē*, 781–782, 15–16 ; 806, 15–16) qui privilégient *krīstyonō* sont là encore le fait d'une intervention explicative du rapporteur, insérées en un discours narratif impersonnel au style indirect⁶⁶. En revanche, et il faut le noter, la seule occurrence des *krīstyonē* en discours direct dans la bouche des détracteurs comporte une ambiguïté doctrinale qui fait vivement réagir Siméon : le roi, au §44, fait mention du « Dieu des chrétiens qui fut fixé à la croix par les juifs »⁶⁷. Siméon précise lui-même que le nom de *krīstyonē* est englobant puisque les marcionites eux-mêmes en font usage comme revêtement mensonger : « Saint Siméon dit : 'Qu'un chrétien (*krīstyonō*) ne dise pareille chose, mon Seigneur roi ! C'est là ce que disent les marcionites, eux qui [profèrent] un mensonge en s'auto-désignant du nom de chrétien' »⁶⁸. Le dialogue de Siméon avec le souverain ne porte donc pas sur une définition terminologique ; le primat se contente d'une rectification théologique en sin-

⁶³ Kmosko, *op. cit.*, 794, §4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 818, §18, 12–13 ; 867, §52, 22–23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 800, §8, 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, cf. 810, 9 ; 883, 19 ; 910, 24.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 858, 5–12.

⁶⁸ Révision de la traduction de Kmosko, *ibid.*, 857–858.

gularisant le courant marcionite et son appropriation abusive du nom porté par les chrétiens.

En étudiant ce passage et en effectuant d'autres rapprochements, J. de Menasce avait proposé l'hypothèse d'une configuration des *krīstyonē* des inscriptions de Kirdīr avec les marcionites. Outre les *Actes de Siméon*, la *Vie de Mār Aba* met l'accent sur la dissimulation des marcionites, qui reprennent l'appellation de chrétiens⁶⁹. J. de Menasce appuie cette assertion sur l'usage préférentiel du grec chez les marcionites, délaissant le syriaque *mešīḥoyē* trop empreint d'histoire vétéro-testamentaire, et *nāsrāyē*, trop géographique, évoquant l'incarnation de Jésus⁷⁰. Cette *Vie de Mār Aba*, datée du VI^e siècle, s'inscrit dans le contexte de l'essor grandissant des communautés marcionites en territoire iranien.

Dans une hymne consacrée aux fausses doctrines, Éphrem mettait déjà en garde contre ce procédé dissimulatoire ; les marcionites comme les daysanites (bardesanites) y sont démasqués comme faux chrétiens (*Hymne* 23, §9, 11–15) :

Quelle grandeur et gloire
d'être appelé "du Messie" (*mešīḥō*)
ou d'être nommé marcionite,

⁶⁹ Encore païen, le futur catholicos Mār Aba rencontre un jeune ascète sur les bords du Tigre. Il lui demande s'il est un *krīstyonō* ou un juif. Le rédacteur précise aussitôt qu'« il disait 'chrétien' (*krīstyonō*) pour dire : 'marcionite' (*marqyūnō*) ». Le jeune homme répond par le même rejet d'identification abusive, rejet déjà observé dans les *Actes de Siméon* : « 'Je suis chrétien, en vérité, et non à la manière des marcionites qui mentent en s'appelant chrétiens' ». L'ascète objecte par une distinction de filiation : si les marcionites sont des disciples de Marcion, ils ne peuvent se revendiquer aussi (sinon frauduleusement) du Christ. P. Bedjan, *Vie de Iabalaha, de trois autres patriarches et de quelques laïcs nestoriens*, Paris 1893, 213. Cf. P. Peeters, « Observations sur la Vie syriaque de Mar Aba, catholicos de l'Église de Perse (540–552) », dans *Miscellanea G. Mercati V : Storia ecclesiastica. Diritto (Studi e Testi* 125), Vatican 1946, 69–112.

⁷⁰ De Menasce, *Une apologétique mazdéenne* (ci-dessus, n. 1), 207–209. Cf. A. von Harnack, *Marcion : Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Monographie*, Leipzig 1921, 263–266 ; H. Leclercq, « Marcion », dans *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, 10/2, 1833–1840.

qu'on te dise "chrétien" (*krīstyonō*)
ou ivraie de daysanite !⁷¹

Mais cette hypothèse de J. de Menasce ne se vérifie pas dans l'ensemble de la littérature présentant la bipolarité *nāṣrāyōl/krīstyonō*, comme nous l'avons constaté. Le substantif *krīstyonō* est généralement employé pour désigner le christianisme de façon globale et universalisante, marque identitaire sans ambiguïté. Le comportement des marcionites relève d'une technique d'insertion à but prosélyte, thématique du revêtement christianisé. Plus proche de l'époque de Kirdīr, Bardesane ne suggère aucune ambivalence lorsqu'il parle des marcionites. Grand adversaire de leurs thèses et lui-même perméable à la culture grecque, il a laissé un ouvrage aujourd'hui perdu pourfendant la doctrine marcionite. Eusèbe de Césarée rend compte de l'habileté dialecticienne de l'édessénien qui « composa des *Dialogues* contre les marcionites et quelques autres qui étaient à la tête de diverses croyances » (*HE* IV, 30, 1). Rédigés en araméen, ces *Dialogues* furent traduits du syriaque en grec et diffusés par de nombreux disciples. Nous ne connaissons malheureusement pas le titre dont se réclamaient les marcionites que connut Bardesane. En revanche, le *Livre des lois des pays*, d'esprit bardesanite, rapporte que les chrétiens installés en tout lieu de l'empire romain oriental et de l'empire iranien étaient appelés *krīstyonē*⁷².

Un exemple de "nazoréen" de Babylonie dans la littérature manichéenne ?

Les *Kephalaia* coptes forment un commentaire doctrinal des *logia* de Māni, alors que la communauté commence à se structurer,

⁷¹ E. Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra haereses* (CSCO 169–170 ; *Script. Syr.* 76–77), Louvain 1957, I, 89 (texte), II, 85 (trad.).

⁷² « Nous tous, en quelque lieu que nous soyons, nous sommes désignés par le nom du Messie, 'chrétiens' » (*krīstyonē*), F. Nau, *Le livre des lois des pays*, Paris 1899, 55 (§57) ; texte 29. Même construction repérable dans les *Actes des martyrs d'Édesse* où le mot *krīstyonō* prédomine, mais associé aux expressions valorisant le *mešīhō*, cf. F.C. Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth* (*Text and Translation Society* [2]), Londres 1913, réimpr. Amsterdam 1981, 91, §3, 11 ; 108, §69, 27 ; 109, §70, 27 ; 123, §29, 12–13 ; 119, §19a, 28–30 ; 120, §19e, 26.

confrontée aux premières polémiques des autorités mazdéennes et chrétiennes⁷³. La première partie du volume est conservée à Berlin dans le ms. P 15996, la deuxième à Dublin (Chester Beatty Library, codex C).

L'un de ces *Kephalaia* manichéens, numéroté LXXXIX, s'intitule « Chapitre du nazoréen qui questionne le maître » et rend compte d'une controverse entre Māni et un nazoréen désigné tantôt sous la graphie *nazoreus* tantôt sous celle de *nazoraïos*⁷⁴. Le nazoréen interroge Māni sur la nature du Dieu qu'il prie : est-il bon ou mauvais ? Māni répond qu'il est avant tout juge de ceux qui font le mal. Dans ce passage, paradoxalement, Māni s'exprime selon une sensibilité monothéiste marquée qui peut paraître, de prime abord, en contradiction apparente avec son système dualiste. Son interlocuteur chrétien lui pose une question essentielle qui le met dans l'embarras et semble bouleverser les données dichotomiques de son détracteur : le Dieu bon, en tant que juge, est conduit à exercer des punitions et donc à faire le mal. Māni répond que les âmes qui ont placé leur cœur et leur trésor dans le diable restent sous son emprise, d'elles-mêmes se détournent de Dieu, et nuisent ainsi par elles-mêmes⁷⁵. Sans vouloir reprendre tout le dossier, nous souhaitons présenter quelques remarques.

Le représentant nazaréen porte une dénomination particulière aux disciples de Jésus de Nazareth, usuelle chez les araméophones de Palestine, Syrie et Mésopotamie. Ce nom ne se rencontre guère en Égypte⁷⁶. C'est ainsi que J. de Menasce a proposé d'y voir un des judéo-chrétiens nazoréens de Palestine, « dont nous savons précisément qu'ils encourageaient la censure des manichéens »⁷⁷. L'itinéraire de

⁷³ M. Tardieu, *Le manichéisme* (*Que sais-je ?* 1940), Paris 1997², 66–67.

⁷⁴ H.-J. Polotsky et A. Böhlig, *Kephalaia*, Stuttgart 1940, 221, 19.21.31 ; 222, 1 (*nazoreus*) ; 221, 28 (*nazoraïos*).

⁷⁵ De Menasce, *Une apologétique mazdéenne*, 230–231.

⁷⁶ Notons qu'Augustin évoque des nazaréens dans son *Contre Faustus* XIX, 4. S'il n'en a pas eu connaissance sur le sol africain, la réputation hérésiologique du groupe condamné par Épiphane à même époque a déjà pu venir jusqu'à lui.

⁷⁷ De Menasce, *Une apologétique mazdéenne*, 207 ; cf. 230.

l'araméen Adda, disciple de Māni, souligne si besoin est l'importance des liens de communication entre la Syrie-Palestine, la Babylonie et l'Égypte⁷⁸ ; la mise en scène pourrait être alors le fruit d'une rencontre issue des missions addaïennes.

La discussion portant sur le milieu culturel auquel appartiendrait ce nazoréen a isolé en critique interne deux éléments suggestifs cherchant à prouver son caractère araméophone plutôt qu'hellénophone :

- L'expression « géhenne de feu » (*Keph.* LXXXIX, 9). La métaphore relève surtout du milieu oraculaire prophétique⁷⁹.
- La présence du mot *bēma*. Même si la référence peut évoquer un milieu araméen, le *bēma*, héritage de l'architecture civile grecque, ne peut à lui seul laisser supposer un contexte exclusivement babylonien et une allusion à cette structure par le nazoréen ne peut présager de son origine iranienne éventuelle⁸⁰. Mais

⁷⁸ M. Tardieu, « L'arrivée des manichéens à al-Hīra », dans *La Syrie de Byzance à l'islam, VII-VIII^e siècles. Actes du colloque international, 11–15 septembre 1990*, Damas 1992, 15–18. Le feuillet historique P 15996 de Berlin rapporte la démarche du manichéen Abiēsou auprès de la reine Thadamōr qui devient protectrice de l'Église des manichéens. La fondation de cette communauté à Palmyre avait été inaugurée par Mār Adda, cf. W. Sundermann, « Studien zur Kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der Iranischen Manichäer », *Altorientalische Forschungen* 13 (1986) 243–244. Adda est considéré aussi comme l'agent premier de la mission en Égypte.

⁷⁹ Elle s'appuie sur la réalité historique et littéraire de la vallée de Guébèn-Hinnom, dont le nom s'est contracté Gué-Hinnom (Jos XV, 8 ; Ne XI, 30), puis en Géhenne dans les langues européennes. Elle a été retenue en milieu syriaque et grec sous une forme orthographique similaire, et peut de fait renvoyer à un contexte eschatologique de jugement final. En reprenant la fonction de cette vallée maudite sous forme de parabole, les textes évangéliques ont contribué à répandre l'image (Mt XVIII, 8 ; Mc IX, 43–47).

⁸⁰ Le mot de βῆμα présente quelques difficultés d'interprétation puisque le terme, selon les auteurs, les régions et les époques, désigne des réalités fort différentes. R.G. Coquin fait à cet effet remarquer qu'il se référerait, dans l'antiquité grecque, à l'estrade du juge (cf. Mt XXVII, 19 pour le siège de Pilate), d'où le sens dérivé de tribunal ou de comparution devant le juge (« Le "bīma" des églises syriennes », *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965) 444). D'un point de vue architectural, la construction des églises et l'établissement d'une hiérarchie ecclésiale confèrent une place spécifique au trône épiscopal et à l'autel, désignés sous ce seul mot de *bēma* et représentant à lui

un autre élément pourrait plus fortement plaider en faveur d'un contexte iranien.

La trajectoire généralement admise pour la transmission linguistique des sources du *Kephalaion* LXXXIX se fonde sur une traduction de l'araméen en grec puis en copte. S.C. Mimouni propose de voir dans l'utilisation du terme copte *nazoreus/nazoraios* l'aboutissement d'un usage oriental, c'est-à-dire un héritage directement inséré de l'original araméen des *Kephalaia* manichéens qui aurait été rédigé en Babylonie à la fin du III^e siècle. Nous souscrivons à son analyse, appuyée sur une étude de vocabulaire, de contexte et du passage lui-même ; il remarque à cet effet que cette attestation serait l'unique cas, dans la littérature manichéenne, d'une désignation par ce terme d'un chrétien de Babylonie : le mot renverrait à une réalité religieuse de l'empire iranien, que l'auteur considère cependant exclusivement comme celle d'un judéo-christianisme elchasaïte⁸¹. Examinons la documentation.

La *Vita Mani* conservée dans le *Codex Manichéen de Cologne* restitue une même atmosphère de *disputatio*, dans ce cas entre Māni et sa communauté d'origine ; mais les membres ne sont connus que sous

seul la totalité du sanctuaire. Les travaux de J. Lassus et G. Tchalenko ont permis de retrouver dans de petits édicules des bēmas, avec leurs meubles *in situ*, et d'établir que leur usage en Syrie était attesté dès le IV^e siècle (A. Grabar, « Les ambons syriens et la fonction liturgique de la nef dans les églises antiques », *Cahiers archéologiques* 1, Paris 1945, 129). Aucun *bēma* antérieur à cette date n'a été conservé ; mais il existait avant cette période. La permanence de cette structure doit sans doute beaucoup à son édification en matériaux durs à partir du IV^e siècle en Syrie I^{ère}, au V^e siècle ailleurs. Les hymnes et fêtes du Bēma dans les communautés manichéennes indiquent une tradition prises à un contexte religieux chrétien (O. Tchalenko, *Églises syriennes à bēma* I [*Bibliothèque archéologique et historique* 105], Paris 1990, 11 ; 240 ; 313–314). Si la littérature relative à cette fête nous a légué la plus ancienne attestation de l'usage liturgique de cet ensemble mobilier autrefois en bois, c'est en raison de sa symbolique : l'autorité de Māni est représentée au sein de sa communauté par l'emplacement vide de son siège. Cf. H.-C. Puech, *Sur le manichéisme et autres essais*, Paris 1979, 389–394 ; J. Riès, « La fête du bēma dans l'Église de Mani », *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 22 (1976) 219–223.

⁸¹ Mimouni, « Les Nazoréens » (ci-dessus, n. 1), 244–251 ; Puech, *Sur le manichéisme*, 246 ; 250–251.

le nom de *Baptistai*. La documentation manichéenne découverte au Fayoum en Égypte comporte des éléments premiers qui rejoignent la même situation de controverse entre Māni et ses anciens coreligionnaires, toujours désignés sous le même nom de *Baptistai* (*Homélie* IV, 13 ; *Keph.* VI et XII⁸²). Une constatation s'impose : jamais le terme de « nazoréen » n'apparaît comme désignation naturelle et habituelle des membres de la communauté mésénienne du CMC où Māni vécut sa jeunesse⁸³. Nous pouvons nous interroger : dans ses inscriptions, comment Kirdīr aurait-il pu appliquer ce nom à un groupe qui ne revendiquait pas pour lui-même cet appellatif ? Pareillement, les textes manichéens disponibles n'ont jamais retenu le nom de « nazoréen » pour désigner un membre de cette communauté ou même un baptiste. L'argument *a silentio* prévaudrait donc comme critère de discernement pour l'appartenance communautaire de ce contradicteur.

L'application de cette appellation à un groupe baptiste n'intervient que dans des sources tardives, en particulier chez Théodore Bar Konaï, auteur de langue syriaque qui écrivit son *Livre des scolies* vers 791. Il y applique le terme aux « mandéens » (*Livre des scolies* XI, 25, *mimrā* XI, 86) : « En Mésène, on les appelle mandéens, maškinéens (litt. gens du Temple), gens de celui qui fait le bien ; [dans] le Bēth-Aramāyē, nazoréens, gens de Dosthi »⁸⁴. Dans leur traduction de ce passage de Théodore Bar Konaï, R. Hespel et R. Draguet ont récemment proposé de corriger le syriaque *naṣrāyē* par « naziréens »⁸⁵. Ce vocable est un héritage marqué par le champ sémantique sémitique de

⁸² *Kephalaia*, éd. Polotsky-Böhlig, 33, 25–32 ; 44, 19–45. Māni évoque auprès de ses disciples les cinq principes des *Baptistai*, appelés les purs (ceux qui se purifient), et les commente. Cf. H.-C. Puech, « Analyse et comptes-rendus », *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 124 (1941) 64.

⁸³ Mimouni, « Les Nazoréens », 259–260 ; 255–256 suggérait une identification des elchasaïtes méséniens avec les *naṣrāyē*, refusant de donner une définition pour les *mktky*. Outre les problèmes attachés à cette assimilation, la logique d'énumération de Kirdīr perd son unité interne au regard de cette hypothèse.

⁸⁴ R. Draguet et R. Hespel, *Théodore bar Koni. Livre des scolies* (CSCO 431–432 ; *Script. Syr.* 187–188), Louvain 1981–1982, II, 257–258.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 258 ; I, 345.

la consécration. Cette nouvelle lecture s'appuie sur des données historiques et littéraires liées au mouvement des Dosithéens. Rappelons que dans les *Homélies clémentines*, Dosithée apparaît comme l'un des disciples privilégiés de Jean Baptiste : à ce titre, il est lui aussi *nazir* (*Hom.* II, 24), comme Jean le Baptiste dans le récit lucanien (Lc I, 15)⁸⁶.

Sans nous attarder sur les auto-désignations des mandéens, rappelons leur vocable de *nāṣrāyē* dans le *Ginza* (aux côtés de la dénomination plus classique de *mandāyē*). Mais paradoxalement, dans ce même livre, M. Lidzbarski a souligné l'association de ces *nāṣrāyē* aux ennemis du groupe, au « monde des ténèbres », en l'occurrence les chrétiens⁸⁷. Cette coïncidence rejoint la thématique que nous avons rencontrée dans nos sources syriaques : là encore, le terme « nazaréen » est employé à l'encontre des chrétiens par les détracteurs⁸⁸. L'information de Bar Konaï associant le terme nazoréen à ce groupe baptiste n'est-elle pas tributaire de son temps ? La contradiction interne d'une terminologie tantôt positive (appliquée au groupe) tantôt négative (pour désigner un ennemi du mouvement) certifie le contexte d'utilisation du mot. Le maintien de cette auto-désignation problématique pour la définition interne du groupe s'expliquerait par un mimétisme de survie face à la menace et à la pression de la loi musulmane à l'encontre des religions non attachées au Coran⁸⁹ : devenu un abri onomastique

⁸⁶ A. Siouville, *Les homélies clémentines*, Paris 1933, réimpr. 1991, 115.

⁸⁷ M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza : der Schatz oder das große Buch der Mandäer*, Göttingen 1925, 327 ; Mimouni, « Les Nazoréens », 211 n. 9 ; 257.

⁸⁸ Puech, « Analyse et comptes-rendus », 64 n. 1. Cf. déjà M.-J. Lagrange, « La gnose mandéenne et la tradition évangélique II. Les origines », *Revue Biblique* 36 (1927) 481–515.

⁸⁹ Cf. pour la mention des *naṣara* dans le Coran, et encore de nos jours au Proche-Orient, comme appellation spécifique des chrétiens, A. Loisy, *Le mandéisme et les origines chrétiennes*, Paris 1934, réimpr. Francfort 1983, 18 ; J.M. Fiey, « Naṣara », dans *Encyclopédie de l'Islam* 7, 970–974. E.R. Hambye a relevé que le nom des Syriens chrétiens de la région du Malabar était « *nazrani* (...) » jusqu'à l'arrivée des missionnaires latins » qui imposèrent le nom de chrétiens (« Note sur les communautés orientales du Malabar », *L'Orient Syrien* 1 [1956] 99–100).

autorisé par le *Livre* des nouveaux maîtres du sol, il est resté, avec son ambivalence, dans les textes sacrés mandéens. Précisons que les recueils fondamentaux mandéens, le *Ginza* en particulier, constituent un ensemble de textes extrêmement disparate par l'âge, la forme et le contenu ; ils ne permettent donc pas de confirmer ou d'infirmer une hypothèse d'équivalence entre les deux courants mandéen et nazaréen à haute époque⁹⁰.

Il nous faut donc considérer, faute de documentation plus précise, le *nazoreus/nazoraïos* du *Kephalaion* LXXXIX comme un chrétien. Le *Kephalaion* LXXXIX ne s'inscrit pas dans une problématique baptiste, ni même n'évoque une question doctrinale, pratique ou morale de la communauté de provenance de Māni, comme c'est le cas dans le *CMC* ou certains *Kephalaia* précités. L'affirmation d'une origine linguistique araméenne de ce texte n'exclut pas l'éventualité d'une identification avec un chrétien de l'empire iranien mis en scène dans une polémique avec Māni. Notons qu'à cette époque, contemporaine des missions manichéennes, des déportés araméophones sont déjà installés dans l'empire perse. Cette expression littéraire serait peut-être imputable à une rédaction du noyau central des *Kephalaia* en araméen babylonien sur base de scènes d'inspiration vécues par Māni dans l'empire iranien. L'appellatif « nazaréen » évoque la réalité nominale bien connue au début du IV^e siècle en Iran, appliqué ici à un chrétien de Babylonie. Un autre argument nous invite à cette conjecture : l'appréciation négative de ce nazaréen, un contradicteur du maître Māni, que l'auteur fait intervenir dans un souci de catéchèse et de mise au point doctrinale ; cette perspective engage nécessairement le rédacteur à suivre une vision dichotomique selon laquelle l'interlocuteur a tort et doit être enseigné.

Deux chroniques syriaques effectuent également une corrélation entre Māni et un groupe de nazaréens : d'après la *Chronique maronite*, du VIII^e/IX^e siècle, et celle de Michel le Syrien (XII^e siècle), Māni au début de sa vie prophétique aurait été ordonné prêtre dans le Bēth-Hūzāyē par des nazaréens. L'appartenance communautaire de ces

⁹⁰ Puech, « Le Mandéisme » (ci-dessus, n. 59), 69–71.

“nazaréens” peut-elle être mieux précisée ? Dans un article de 1993 édité en 1997, W. Klein est prêt à concéder aux chroniques des détails crédibles sur l’histoire de Māni, détails qui, selon lui, restitueraient une source primitive manichéenne⁹¹. Cette source initiale aurait pour centre le séjour de Māni dans le Hūzistān. L’auteur stipule que la tradition ou le document à l’origine de ces développements littéraires aurait appliqué le mot nazaréen aux anciens coreligionnaires baptistes ; cette désignation aurait été restituée par les sources chrétiennes⁹². L’existence d’un sacerdoce au sein des baptistes de Mésène dont provenait Māni (Sitaïos est presbytre, *CMC* 74, 12⁹³) permettrait par ailleurs de s’interroger sur le cadre communautaire de la prétendue ordination sacerdotale de Māni lui-même.

En fait, les chroniqueurs se contentent de présenter le fondateur venu dans le pays des Perses et à Bēth-Lapaṭ « marchant dans les doctrines des nazaréens »⁹⁴. Les deux chroniques s’expriment en des termes similaires, proposant les mêmes thématiques de type hérésiologique, pour certaines déjà repérables dans les *Acta Archelai* :

(*Chronique maronite*) : Corbicus se saisit de tous les livres et de l’or [de la femme qui le recueillit] et partit vers la région des Perses. Il alla dans la maison paternelle et là se donna le nom de Māni ; il séduisit beaucoup de gens par ses livres, comme si lui-même les avait composés. Il les transmettait sous un aspect chrétien. Voyant qu’il était versé dans les doctrines des nazaréens en ce temps-là, ils le firent prêtre là. Il devint interprète des écritures et disputait contre les juifs et les païens. Il s’agrégea trois disciples (qu’il envoya en mission) Quand [ceux-ci] revinrent, ils lui firent savoir que personne ne les avait reçus ; il fut irrité et abandonna la doctrine des chrétiens qu’il ne professait pas dans sa pureté depuis le début⁹⁵.

⁹¹ W. Klein, « War Mani Priester der Perserkirche ? », dans Cirillo et van Tongerloo (éd.), *Atti del terzo congresso* (ci-dessus, n. 16) 201–211.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 203–204 ; 213.

⁹³ A. Henrichs et L. Koenen, *Die Kölner Mani-Kodex* (*Papyrologica Coloniensia* 14), Cologne 1988, 50–51.

⁹⁴ J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d’Antioche, 1166–1199 I*, Paris 1901, 199 ; *id.*, « Chronicon maroniticum », *Chronica minora II* (*CSCO* 4 ; *Script. Syr.* 4), Louvain 1904, 47–48.

⁹⁵ J.-B. Chabot, « Chronicon maroniticum », *Chronica minora I* (*CSCO* 3, *Script. Syr.* 4), Louvain 1903, 48 ; 59–60 texte.

(*Chronique de Michel*) : [Corbicus] prit la fortune et les livres [de la femme qui le recueillit] (...) Il se fit appeler Māni et séduisit beaucoup de gens à l'aide de ces livres. Il les donnait comme chrétiens. Voyant qu'il marchait dans les doctrines des nazaréens, ils le firent prêtre. Il devint interprète des écritures et disputait contre les juifs et les païens. Parmi ceux qui étaient avec lui, il envoya (*suivent quelques noms de disciples*). Quand ces derniers revinrent et lui firent savoir que personne ne les avait reçus, il abandonna la doctrine des chrétiens⁹⁶.

Soulignons-le à nouveau, dans le *CMC*, les baptistes ne sont jamais désignés sous le nom de « nazaréens » et la titulature sacerdotale n'est pas un argument décisif pour rattacher ce groupe aux baptistes. En effet, le terme *presbuteros* renvoie également à un titre hiérarchique manichéen (troisième rang des élus)⁹⁷, aussi bien que chrétien ou païen. Les sources relatives à la jeunesse de Māni ne parlent jamais d'un sacerdoce ministériel parmi les baptistes ; mais pareil statut peut se comprendre aussi à un niveau symbolique parmi les manichéens : le Guide est aussi le Sceau des prophètes et l'Intercesseur par excellence (fonction sacerdotale). Par ailleurs, du parcours de Māni ici décrit on ne saurait conclure à une identification chronologique déterminante : les chroniqueurs situent unanimement la séquence *après* l'enfance de Māni, lorsque, adulte, il tente déjà avec succès d'enseigner sa propre voie dans un contexte d'essor de son propre mouvement (envoi de disciples). D'autre part, aucune présence du courant baptiste dans le Bēth-Hūzāyē n'est attestée ; or, les sources sont unanimes pour rattacher le pseudo-statut sacerdotal de Māni à cette région.

Si nous replaçons le terme dans le contexte de chacune des sources considérées, le substantif conserve un référent sans ambiguïté : le terme « nazaréen » désigne les chrétiens au sens général. Chez Michel le Syrien, la corrélation « doctrine des nazaréens »/« doctrine des chrétiens » (abandonnée pour insuccès) ne laisse pas de doute sur l'interprétation. Les deux chroniques présentées ont en commun un fil

⁹⁶ Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, 199.

⁹⁷ S. Clackson *et al.*, *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts*, I, Turnhout 1998, 44 ; 81 ; 209 (formule longue d'abjuration, *PG* I, 1468A, 14 ; *Homélie manichéennes* XVI, 17 ; XXII, 5 ; XLIV, 23 ; *Kephalaion* XLII, 4 ; Augustin, *De Haeresibus* XLVI, 16, 173) ; Tardieu, *Le manichéisme* (ci-dessus, n. 73) 76.

narratif selon lequel Māni (Corbicus) dupe ses auditeurs en se dissimulant sous un jour séduisant et connu. L'image de l'hérétique qui change son nom et dupe les foules a pour héritage littéraire la figure de Simon le magicien ; tel est bien le Māni ainsi décrit, nouveau séducteur qui remporte des succès mal acquis⁹⁸. Une relecture chrétienne de l'avancée manichéenne sur fond de rivalité missionnaire entre les deux communautés a appliqué à Māni des fonctions et des titulatures chrétiennes : de tels textes tendent essentiellement, selon les conventions de l'hérésiologie, à montrer en Māni un danger pour l'Église, s'étendant à l'envi sur l'esprit faussé et trompeur du fondateur, dès l'origine. Les sources présentées n'auraient-elles pas plutôt implicitement mêlé un vocabulaire manichéen proche de la lexicologie chrétienne ? Dans un contexte confus qui témoigne néanmoins d'une connaissance de la structure interne des communautés manichéennes, ces textes manifestent une intention polémique, celle de la duperie du personnage⁹⁹.

⁹⁸ Cf. M. Tardieu, « Archelaus », dans *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 2/3, Londres et New York 1987, 280, pour la description donnée par le récit des *Acta Archelai*. Cf. M. Vermes et S.N.C. Lieu, *Hegemonius. Acta Archelai (Manichaeen Studies 4)*, Turnhout 2001.

⁹⁹ Cette méthode d'inculturation se retrouvera en Égypte : à la fin du IV^e siècle, les manichéens pénètrent les rangs monastiques, se faisant passer pour des ascètes chrétiens et perçus tels par les groupes récepteurs, cf. J.-D. Dubois, « La présence des manichéens en Égypte », *Dossiers d'Archéologie* 226 (1997) 10–14. Les hérésiologues ont repris cette perception d'un camouflage de Māni au sein des milieux à conquérir ; la notice d'Épiphanes s'en fait l'écho : Māni était « païen avec les païens » et adorait le soleil et la lune (*Panarion* LXXXVIII, 3) ; cf. F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis Livres II et III (Nag Hammadi and Manichaeen Studies 36)*, Leiden 1994, 307. Au-delà du discours hérésiologique et de ses *topoi*, ce procédé missionnaire pourrait trahir chez les manichéens une réelle méthode puisque nous retrouvons pareille attitude en milieu bouddhiste, taoïste, mais aussi parmi les religions païennes de l'empire. Le catéchisme manichéen chinois mentionne les *moxixide* (pehlevi *mahistagān*), intendants ou prêtres, « maîtres de la cour de la loi ». Le prêtre là encore est préposé à l'interprétation de la loi. Cf. N. Tajadod, *Mani, le Bouddha de lumière. Catéchisme manichéen chinois*, Paris 1990, 6–11. Les *Acta Archelai* présentent le prophète en débat avec des servants de Mithra au chapitre LIII, désignant Māni comme un prêtre mithriaste (XL, 7), vêtu comme tel (XIV, 3), *PG* 10, 1459–1460 ;

Dans la lignée des *Acta Archelai* et à même époque environ que la *Chronique maronite*, la *Chronique de Séert* rapporte la même tradition sur Māni (Corbicus), mais l'ordination sacerdotale est explicitement conférée par un évêque de Susiane. L'ambiguïté polysémique de l'*episcopos* renvoie encore à une double interprétation chrétienne et manichéenne¹⁰⁰ ; mais ici, le processus d'ordination a prévalu pour l'auteur chrétien qui décrit un milieu ecclésial. Le texte arabe n'utilise que le mot *nāṣrāniyā* et n'en connaît pas d'autres ; l'appellatif « nazaréen » n'a, dans ce contexte, aucun sens spécifique. Là encore, Māni se fait passer pour tel : « [il] fit semblant d'être chrétien », « [il] abandonna la religion chrétienne qu'il avait fait semblant de pratiquer » (*nāṣrāniyā*)¹⁰¹. C'est ici la même optique qui a été choisie (peut-être à partir d'une tradition commune avec la *Chronique maronite*). Cette thématique des chroniques syriaques s'enracine vraisemblablement dans les événements intervenus sous Vahrām II au moment de la persécution contre les chrétiens et les manichéens. La *Chronique de Séert* applique aux manichéens ces mêmes griefs de duperie :

[sous Vahrām II] les manichéens se disaient chrétiens, s'habillaient comme eux¹⁰².

Les mages opprimèrent alors les chrétiens sans distinction [chrétiens et manichéens].

Les manichéens s'habillent comme les chrétiens pour se cacher¹⁰³.

Dans son *Kitāb al-ʿUnvan (Histoire universelle)*, Agapius de Membidj rapporte la même tradition d'une consécration par un évêque du Ḥūzistān (al-Aḥwaz, métropole au nom générique pour la région) ;

G. Widengren, « Manichaeism and its Iranian Background », *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3/2, 970.

¹⁰⁰ Clackson *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 201 (Augustin, *De Haeresibus* XLVI, 16, 174 ; Psautier *manichéen* XIX, 10 ; XLIV, 9 ; formule longue d'abjuration, PG I, 1468A, 13). Deux occurrences du CMC, 35, 5 et 126, 3, présentent deux *episcopoi* qui se rapportent explicitement à la hiérarchie manichéenne : Henrichs et Koenen, *Mani-Kodex* (ci-dessus, n. 93), 20–21 ; 90–91.

¹⁰¹ Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite » (ci-dessus, n. 7), 225 [15]–227 [17].

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 237 [27].

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 238 [28].

Māni restera à Suse avec un de ses disciples, envoyant deux autres en mission. Nous retrouvons la même insistance sur l'irritation de Māni après l'annonce de l'échec de la première mission ; abandonnant la doctrine des chrétiens « qu'il avait professée en apparence », Māni révèle alors, à propos de ses prédications chrétiennes : « Je ne parlais pas sérieusement »¹⁰⁴.

Ces extraits permettent d'appuyer l'hypothèse d'une tradition hérésiologique selon laquelle Māni reprit à son compte l'héritage chrétien pour apparaître comme le nouveau Messie prêtre enseignant. Les opinions exprimées dans ces sources hérésiologiques sur la vie de Māni doivent être prises en compte avec prudence, W. Klein reconnaissant lui-même le danger de toute interprétation à partir de cette documentation orientée. Certes, le renvoi à une terminologie manichéenne souligne bien l'existence de « sources primaires manichéennes riches » mais l'argumentation n'apparaît pas assez fondée pour déterminer une indication chronologique contemporaine de la période baptiste de Māni – supposé hypothétique. Il convient d'insister sur les informations livrées par ces sources anti-manichéennes quant aux procédés missionnaires du mouvement de Māni cherchant à s'insérer dans le milieu à conquérir. Nous pourrions considérer que la période mouvementée des premières persécutions de Vahrām contre les manichéens a pu cristalliser cette démarche bien connue des chrétiens qui la retinrent désormais comme exemplaire et la diffusèrent plus tard sous la forme d'un type hérésiologique.

Distinction onomastique en Mésopotamie du nord

Après cet examen en milieu iranien, il importe de considérer à présent l'usage des mots nazaréen et chrétien en contexte littéraire syrien et mésopotamien, toujours dans un cadre non hétérodoxe. Avec ces deux termes, la littérature chrétienne de ces régions comporte une troisième dénomination, celle de *mešihoyō*, transcription exacte du mot grec *krīstyonō* : disciple du Messie/Christ, "chrétien". Si le Christ

¹⁰⁴ A. Vassiliev, « *Kitāb al-'Unvan* (Histoire universelle) écrite par Agapius de Membidj II/1 », *Patrologia Orientalis* 7/4, Paris 1911, 533 [77]–534 [78].

est en général désigné par le syriaque *mešihō*, le substantif *krīstyonō* pour les chrétiens reste le plus répandu dans la littérature syrienne et mésopotamienne. Cependant, *mešihoyō* a parfois été privilégié sur décalque de *mešihō* par volonté d'identification particulière du groupe. L'emploi du terme dérivé *mešihoyō* n'est pas partout repérable, moins encore, à époque ancienne, dans l'aire géographique babylonienne ou iranienne¹⁰⁵.

Ce sont essentiellement les textes originaux de Syrie qui s'en font l'écho. Nous avons pu repérer quelques grands axes suffisamment signifiants.

Une équivalence mešihoyō/krīstyonō

Les canons attribués à Mārūthā de Maypherqat donnent l'équivalence littérale *mešihoyō/krīstyonō*, insistant sur la particularité antiochéenne du second terme (cf. *Actes des apôtres* XI, 26) et sur l'équivalence syriaque du premier :

[À Antioche, les croyants reçurent le nom par lequel ils devaient être appelés (chrétiens). Pourquoi ?] Parce que le Messie, d'après le grec, est appelé Christos. Et, comme, à cause du jardin, on appelle un homme jardinier, ainsi sur le nom du Christ les "chrétiens" (*krīstyonē*) sont-ils appelés, [ce] qui se traduit en syriaque *mešihoyē*¹⁰⁶.

Même aperçu chez un stylite monophysite originaire d'une ville de Syrie du nom de Gousit près d'Émèse, qu'évoque Michel le Syrien¹⁰⁷,

¹⁰⁵ Le terme est représenté plus tardivement dans la tradition orientale du manichéisme sous la forme originale araméenne *mešihō*, transmise en parthe et en sogdien : M. Boyce, *A Word-List of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (*Acta Iranica* 9a), Téhéran et Liège 1977, 58 ; W. Sundermann, *Mitteliranische Manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts* (*Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients* : *Berliner Turfantexte* 11), Berlin 1981, 165 ; 184–185. Cependant, si Māni lui-même s'auto-désignait comme apôtre de Jésus Messie, ses disciples ne se présentèrent jamais comme des adeptes du Messie, *mešihoyē* : F. Decret, *Mani et la tradition manichéenne*, Paris 1974, 70.

¹⁰⁶ A. Vööbus, *The Canons ascribed to Mārūtā of Maipherqat and related sources* (CSCO 539–540, *Script. Syr.* 191–192), Louvain 1982, I, 13 ; II, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* (ci-dessus, n. 94), 414–416.

et qui vécut dans la première moitié du VIII^e siècle. Commentant le verset 15 du chapitre LXV d'Isaïe : « Que le Seigneur te fasse mourir ! Mais à mes serviteurs sera donné un nom nouveau », Serge le stylite identifie ce nom nouveau à celui de *krīstyōnō* qu'il assimile naturellement à celui de *mešīḥoyō* du point de vue du sens : « Et ses serviteurs [le Seigneur] les appellera d'un autre nom et c'est "chrétien" (*kristyōnō*) qui signifie "disciple du Messie" (*mešīḥoyō*) »¹⁰⁸.

Un passage de l'exposé XXIII « sur le grain de raisin » d'Aphraate le sage persan (mort en 345) a donné lieu à plusieurs interprétations :

Au lever de la lumière de l'intelligence et à la fructification de l'olivier qui fournit la lumière, avec lequel on fait la marque du sacrement de la vie et par lequel sont rendus parfaits les *mešīḥoyē* : prêtres, rois et prophètes »¹⁰⁹.

Dans un contexte métaphorique sacramentel, dans lequel l'olivier déploie toute sa symbolique, la tournure *mešīḥoyē* prend un double sens. Ce sont d'abord les oints « prêtres, rois et prophètes », sens que restitue la traduction de M.-J. Pierre. Dans une traduction latine du début du siècle éditée par J. Parisot, l'auteur traduit le terme syriaque par son équivalent traditionnel, *christiani*¹¹⁰. Le contexte de chrismation est ici étroitement lié à la perspective baptismale : la « marque du sacrement de la vie » fait écho aux « prêtres, rois et prophètes ». Ainsi « rendu parfait », l'oint est inclus dans la communauté chrétienne. Aussi la traduction de *mešīḥoyē* par « chrétiens » est-elle subsidiaire, les oints ayant revêtu l'Oint par excellence¹¹¹ ; le chrétien est d'abord un baptisé¹¹².

¹⁰⁸ A.P. Hayman, *The Disputatio of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew* (CSCO 338–339, *Script. Syr.* 152–153), Louvain 1973, I, 27 ; II, 28. Pour une autre équivalence *mešīḥoyō/krīstyōnō* : « Ils sont appelés *mešīḥoyē* sur le nom du Christ (*Krīstōs*) » ; R. Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus syriacus* I, Oxonii 1879, 1821.

¹⁰⁹ M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le Sage persan. Les exposés II, (XXI–XXIII)* (*Sources Chrétiennes* 359), Paris 1989, 880–881.

¹¹⁰ J. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, dans *Patrologia Syriaca* 1/2, Turnhout 1907, 9 ; trad. 10.

¹¹¹ Cf. Ga III, 27 : « Vous tous, baptisés dans le Christ, vous avez revêtu le Christ ».

¹¹² Cf. références à la littérature syriaque en particulier chez Éphrem et dans la doctrine syriaque : R. Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus syriacus* II, Oxonii 1901, 2241–2242. Les termes *mešīḥoyē/mešīḥoithō*, équivalence pour « chrétiens », « religion

Une référence aux chrétiens comme *nāṣrāyē* en milieu syrien

Il n'est pas lieu de développer ici les groupes portant le nom de nazaréens recensés par les catalogues hérésiologiques ; pour cette question, nous renvoyons notamment à la récente analyse de S.C. Mimouni¹¹³.

Dans la *Didascalia apostolorum* en syriaque est conservée cette nomenclature. Cet ancien document d'origine grecque est classiquement daté de la moitié du III^e siècle¹¹⁴. Il fut traduit en syriaque vers la fin du IV^e siècle et les manuscrits ne sont préservés que dans cette langue¹¹⁵. A. Vööbus a détaillé une constellation de sources utilisées, à son sens, dans la composition du texte (*Didachè*, Justin, *Oracles Sibyllins* XX, Ignace d'Antioche) ; il présume qu'objectivement, le lieu d'origine du texte serait soit la Palestine, soit la Syrie du nord. Les études de J. Sanders ont confirmé l'origine syrienne¹¹⁶. Un arien semble être l'auteur de cette élaboration. D'entrée, les douze apôtres confèrent à Clément

chrétienne», sont attestés comme extension possible du premier sens d'« onction » chez Titus de Bostra : « les chrétiens (*krīstyōnē*) sont appelés *mešīḥoyē* », P. Lagarde, *Titus de Bostra, Contra manichaeos* IV, Berlin 1859, 133.24 ; et chez Éphrem : « *mešīḥoyē*, les disciples du Messie ».

¹¹³ Mimouni, « Les Nazaréens » (ci-dessus n. 1), 208–262.

¹¹⁴ P. Galtier, « La date de la *Didascalie des apôtres* », *Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique* 42 (1947) 315–351. Cf. F.X. Funk, « La date de la *Didascalie des apôtres* », *Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique* 2 (1901) 798–809 ; F. Nau, *La Didascalie des douze apôtres* (*Ancienne Littérature canonique syriaque* 1), Paris 1912, VIII–XVII.

¹¹⁵ Compilation de plusieurs sources chrétiennes, les *Constitutions Apostoliques* concèdent à la *Didascalia* une part importante ; ce travail pourrait avoir eu lieu vers 375 d'après B. Altaner et A. Stuiber, *Patrologie*, Fribourg 1966, 255–256. Cf. J.V. Barlet, « Fragments of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* », *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1916–1917) 301–305 : il étudie les quelques fragments grecs conservés. A. Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* (CSCO 401–402, 407–408, *Script. Syr.* 175–176, 179–180), Louvain 1979, I/2, 25*–31* ; *id.*, « Notes et mélanges. Découverte de nouvelles sources de la *Didascalie* syriaque », *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 64/3 (1976) 459–462, où le détail des manuscrits est donné.

¹¹⁶ J. Sanders, « Autour de la *Didascalie* », dans *A Tribute to A. Vööbus : Studies in Early Christian Literature and its Environment, primarily in the Syrian East*, éd. R.H. Fischer, Chicago 1977, 47–54.

de Rome (attribution honorifique anachronique) la précieuse *Didascalie*, en réalité premier essai d'un corpus de droit ecclésiastique, destinée aux chrétiens de Syrie appelés alors *nāṣrāyē mešīḥoyē*, « nazaréens chrétiens ». On leur enjoint de respecter les commandements écrits afin d'être bénis par le Christ ; suivent la menace de tourments pour les indifférents et la promesse de vie éternelle pour ceux qui font le bien :

Nous les douze apôtres . . . assemblés à Jérusalem la cité du Grand Roi, avec notre frère Paul apôtre des Gentils et Jacques évêque de la cité ci-dessus mentionnée, avons ratifié la *Didascalia* . . . Nous avons écrit cet autre livre d'enseignements qui éclaire tout le monde habité. Nous l'avons écrit et nous l'avons envoyé par les mains de Clément notre associé. Et ce que vous entendez, nazaréens chrétiens (*nāṣrāyē mešīḥoyē*) qui sont sous le soleil, c'est ce que vous devez apprendre avec diligence et soin¹¹⁷.

Notons que ce n'est pas ici la transcription *krīstyonē* qui se juxtapose à *nāṣrāyē*. En fait, la raison de cette appellation s'éclaire par l'écho final conclusif centré sur Jésus de Nazareth, le "nazoréen" :

Que Dieu ouvre les oreilles de nos cœurs pour recevoir ses mots . . . [l'enseignement] du Seigneur à travers l'évangile et l'enseignement de Jésus Christ le nazaréen (*mešīḥō nāṣrāyō*) qui fut crucifié aux jours de Ponce Pilate¹¹⁸.

Dans les *Constitutions Apostoliques* (CA) et leurs versions latines figure la *Didascalie* (CA I–VI). Les *Constitutions*, fruits d'une compilation complexe, sont présentées comme émanant des apôtres, adoptant le style pseudépigraphique. Géographiquement, M. Metzger situe sa composition au sein d'une importante communauté, d'un réseau de copistes, dans le cadre d'une grande ville de Syrie (Antioche probablement). Les problèmes pastoraux soulevés par le rédacteur témoignent d'un christianisme très largement répandu qui subit déjà des relâchements (VI, 15 ; II, 61) ; un détail permet d'affiner la datation : la fonction de chantre confirmée au concile de Laodicée dans la deuxième

¹¹⁷ Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, I/1, 10 ; I/2, 9. A. Vööbus signale l'omission du terme *mešīḥoyē* dans le ms. Birmingham Mingana syr. 4, alors qu'il est conservé dans le ms. Monserrat Orient. 31.

¹¹⁸ Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, II/1, 265 ; II/2, 247.

moitié du IV^e siècle¹¹⁹. Les *Constitutions* ont conservé l'expression *nāṣrāyē mešīhoyē* (VI, 30, 8) qui pourrait trahir une appellation originelle de la communauté primitive. Il s'agit de chrétiens dont le point focal se resserre autour de la personne de Jésus de Nazareth.

La légende de Judas Kyriakos, d'origine orientale, a très récemment été réétudiée par H.J.W. et J.W. Drijvers¹²⁰ ; un nouvel examen des manuscrits de Léninegrad (NS 4) et de Londres (British Library Add. 14644) les incite à donner pour provenance l'aire linguistique grecque, la légende ayant connu une grande expansion dans les régions de langue syriaque au nord de la Mésopotamie. Le récit, daté généralement entre un *terminus post quem* de 233 pour le passage de Protonice, et un *terminus ante quem* autour du VI^e siècle, proviendrait selon toute vraisemblance du milieu jérusalémite. Cette assertion repose essentiellement sur des éléments-fondateurs de mouvements de pèlerinage dans la contrée, mis en évidence à travers la trame textuelle.

Aux jours de sa victoire sur les peuples du Danube grâce à l'ostension de la croix vue en songe, Constantin s'interroge sur l'origine de ce signe. Des chrétiens demandent audience et interprètent le sens de la victoire : « En ces jours-là, les chrétiens (*krīstyonē*) appelés nazaréens (*nāṣrāyē*) par ceux qui servent [comme soldats] . . . »¹²¹. Le texte insiste sur le regard des soldats porté sur ce noyau chrétien. Séquence introductive à l'invention de la croix par Hélène, mère de Constantin, nous y verrions volontiers une allusion implicite, déjà, à l'origine géographique attribuée au Messie, et ce en corrélation avec la désignation du Christ sur la croix. D'ailleurs, ce qui confirmerait cet argument, une référence à « Jésus le nazaréen » (reprenant la formulation évangélique

¹¹⁹ M. Metzger, *Les Constitutions Apostoliques I (Sources Chrétiennes 320)*, Paris 1985, 54–62.

¹²⁰ H.J.W. Drijvers et J.W. Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross : The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac (CSCO 565, Subsidia 93)*, Louvain 1997, 23–27 ; 30–31 (liste des manuscrits). Cf. M. van Esbroeck, « Le manuscrit syriaque NS 4 de Léninegrad (V^e siècle) », *Mélanges A. Guillaumont. Contribution à l'étude des christianismes orientaux (Cahiers d'orientalisme 20)*, Genève 1988, 211–219.

¹²¹ Drijvers et Drijvers, *op. cit.*, 38 (fol. 75^v du ms. de Saint-Petersbourg NS 4) ; trad. 54.

de Jn XIX, 19 ; Mc I, 24 ; Lc IV, 34) éclate en pleine assemblée au moment crucial où Judas Kyriakos identifie la véritable croix du Sauveur (fol. 82^r) : un possédé harrangue le Sauveur, lui reprochant d'avoir révélé à son disciple Judas Kyriakos l'endroit où était déposée la Sainte Croix, source de bienfaits pour les hommes et de persécutions pour Satan¹²². Il semble donc difficile d'aller au-delà d'une corrélation régionale, sachant par ailleurs que le texte est probablement d'origine jérusalémite.

Ainsi donc, le mot *krīstyōnō* fonctionne comme un équivalent de *mešīhoyō* en milieu araméen, en Syrie et tout particulièrement en Mésopotamie du nord. Les deux termes sont interchangeables et dépendent, dans leur utilisation et leur diffusion, d'une aire ou d'un substrat de réception linguistique. La présence fortuite du mot *nāsrāyō* dans ce contexte n'a aucune répercussion politique ou religieuse, comme nous l'avons constaté en Iran ; il s'agit ici d'un repère géographique, d'une différenciation de groupe, d'une identification patronale, peut-être d'origine jérusalémite. Cette provenance onomastique se devine à travers certaines insistances textuelles : dans la *Didascalie* comme dans les *Constitutions Apostoliques*, les apôtres sont rassemblés à Jérusalem, « la cité du Grand Roi », auprès de Jacques évêque de cette cité¹²³ ; la base du récit de Judas Kyriakos repose sur la légende de l'*Inventio* de la Croix à Jérusalem. Nous sommes donc en présence d'un référent aux origines du mouvement chrétien. La diffusion que connurent ces textes, notamment en région mésopotamienne septentrionale, n'a pas altéré les éléments primitifs qui sont comme importés en ces territoires. Le contexte est loin d'être hétérodoxe : l'emploi du mot nazaréen n'a ici aucun arrière-fond péjoratif. La finalité du rédacteur semble même se focaliser sur une intention d'unité ecclésiale ; les deux mouvances missionnaires d'ouverture (tendance chrétienne) et de conservatisme pratique (tendance nazaréenne) sont alliées en leur personnages représentatifs : Paul est l'un des premiers apôtres

¹²² *Ibid.*, 48 ; trad. 66.

¹²³ Jacques frère du Seigneur est encore vivant aux premiers chapitres de la *Didascalie* (CA II, 55, 2 ; VI, 12–14) ; il est mentionné mort en CA VII, 46, 2.

mentionnés, aux premières lignes qui ouvrent la *Didascalie*, appelé « notre frère », « apôtre des Gentils », associé aux autres disciples de Jésus pour représenter l'Église universelle (tous ceux qui « sont sous le soleil ») ; il figure aux côtés de Jacques de Jérusalem. L'intention du rédacteur est claire : il a placé son récit au-dessus de tout particularisme afin de lui assurer une audience élargie. Vraisemblablement rédigé par un lettré de Syrie du nord, le texte restitue une situation originelle : celle d'une cohabitation de diverses traditions missiologiques (les *mešīḥoyē* en contexte mésopotamien correspondant à l'appellation *krīstyonē* d'Ac XI, 26, et les *nāṣrāyē*), en des lieux où la question quartodécimane resta longtemps en débat. Ce contexte interne à l'Église syrienne n'avait cependant plus de véritable résonance en Mésopotamie au IV^e siècle : la rareté du mot *nāṣrāyō* dans la littérature syriaque de cette région marque l'absence d'un usage terminologique par les populations. Si cette désignation chrétienne eut un retentissement spécifique dans la zone palestino-syrienne en un temps donné, l'acception a totalement perdu sa valeur pour les populations de Haute-Mésopotamie première à la fin du IV^e siècle pour se réduire à un trait d'explicitation et d'identification géographique, ou à un reliquat de la période précédente (*Constitutions Apostoliques* par exemple qui intègrent des données plus anciennes).

Les différentes appellations internes à l'Église (*nāṣrāyō/mešīḥoyō*) repérables dans la littérature examinée ne concernent pas d'éventuels courants christianisants hétérodoxes tels les nazaréens aux pratiques judéo-chrétiennes calcifiées décrits par Épiphane au IV^e siècle (*Panarion* XXIX, 1–9)¹²⁴. Lors des expéditions militaires de Šāpūr I^{er} en Syrie et en Mésopotamie du nord, des chrétiens grossiront les rangs des prisonniers. Une cinquantaine d'années après ces déplacements de population, à l'époque de Kirdīr, nous ne pouvons que constater en Iran l'absence de toute connotation judéo-chrétienne primitive attachée au substantif “nazaréen” : dans les *Actes* des martyrs l'utilisation de ce mot renvoie toujours à un contexte religieux en milieu païen ; d'autre

¹²⁴ Williams, *Panarion* (ci-dessus, n. 99), 112–119. Cf. A. Pourkier, *L'hérésiologie chez Épiphane de Salamine (Christianisme antique 4)*, Paris 1992, 447–475.

part, chez les auteurs pénétrés de culture judaïque comme Aphraate, le terme n'apparaît jamais.

Conclusion. Proposition pour une identification

La distinction *krīstyonō/nāṣrāyō* dans les inscriptions de Kirdīr a retenu toute notre attention : nous en rappelons ici, brièvement, les orientations, afin de proposer une piste de recherche. Un examen minutieux de la documentation syriaque suscite trois conclusions :

- Lorsqu'il figure dans nos textes, le terme *nāṣrāyō* en contexte iranien est en principe énoncé par les détracteurs des chrétiens (représentants du mazdéisme : mages, souverains, ministres ...) qui désignent un petit groupe géographiquement circonscrit dans l'empire¹²⁵. Les textes de la période arabe (telle la *Chronique de Séert*) sont peu signifiants, puisque les chrétiens syriaques orientaux étaient classiquement appelés *naṣara*¹²⁶. En milieu

¹²⁵ Par une argumentation un peu différente, S.P. Brock parvient à des conclusions comparables aux nôtres. Après G. Wiessner, et reprenant les lignes de son argumentation, S.P. Brock avait remarqué l'utilisation péjorative du terme *naṣrāyō* par les Perses. Cf. Wiessner, *Untersuchungen* (ci-dessus, n. 62), 68–71 ; S.P. Brock, « Some aspects of Greek Words in Syriac », dans *Synkretismus im syrisch-persischen Kulturgebiet. Symposion, Reinhausen bei Göttingen 1971* (*Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philol.-Hist. Klasse* 96), éd. A. Dietrich, Göttingen 1975, 91–95. Sa rapide étude pose l'hypothèse de l'introduction terminologique *krīstyonō*, occidentale, par le biais des déportations ; il en vient à proposer *meṣiḥoyō* comme terme d'auto-désignation des chrétiens perses autochtones, « even if not demonstrable ». C'est à la fin du IV^e-début du V^e siècle que *nazoréen* aurait pris une connotation négative ; *meṣiḥoyō* aurait progressivement été remplacé, avec l'influence antiochénienne, par *krīstyonō*. Le mot *meṣiḥoyō* n'est malheureusement pas attesté comme auto-identification des chrétiens de Perse.

¹²⁶ Exemple est donné d'un moine du nom de Rabban Mār ʿAbda qui lutta contre les marcionites en Bēth-Aramāyē. Ces derniers « avaient perverti un grand nombre de nazaréens et rempli leurs demeures de magie » ; le religieux les ramène à leur foi première. Un de ses disciples, Aḥḥa, condamne et poursuit les marcionites et les manichéens « qui s'étaient infiltrés parmi les nazaréens » en les corrompant ; Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite » (ci-dessus, n. 7), 196.

syro-mésopotamien non hétérodoxe, le mot nazaréen renvoie aux disciples de Jésus de Nazareth ou au contexte évangélique.

- *krīstyonō* est la forme classique choisie par les *narrateurs* ; c'est le mot courant pour désigner les chrétiens. Toutefois, certains passages permettent de préciser son attribution expresse aux déportés et/ou descendants de déportés. Dans ce cas, *nāṣrāyō* est toujours absent.
- Un troisième terme spécifique désigne les chrétiens de la zone mésopotamienne, celui de *mešīhoyē*, disciples du Messie. Nous avons pu constater l'équivalence rigoureuse avec *krīstyonē*. Par ailleurs, il est utilisé dans des textes syriens (par leur provenance, leur ancrage géographique ou leur destinataire), ou comme explicitation étymologique du terme grec.

En pehlevi et sogdien aussi bien qu'en persan moderne, c'est le terme *tarsākān* qui désigne les chrétiens. La racine *tars-* les présente comme « ceux qui craignent » ; pour J. de Menasce, cette appellation pourrait avoir été introduite en sogdien par le syriaque *dhl* dans un contexte de développement du monachisme¹²⁷. Sans revêtir un sens nécessairement biblique, le mot a été repris par la tradition pehlevie du psautier manichéen dans lequel les ennemis sont appelés *na-tarsāgān*, les « non-craignants »¹²⁸. Mais ce terme (que nous

¹²⁷ Pour J. de Menasce, il est probable que le moine ait été le représentant le plus populaire du christianisme pour le monde iranien qui le persécuta, notamment en raison de son célibat ; c'est par dérision que les chrétiens iraniens auraient été raillés sous le nom de craignant-Dieu en raison de leur radicalité les écartant de la vie sociale (*Une apologétique mazdéenne* [ci-dessus, n. 1], 209).

¹²⁸ Les fragments du manuscrit sogdien C2 présentent toujours les chrétiens sous cette dénomination. Découvert par la deuxième et troisième expédition dans le nord du Turfān (1904–1905 et 1905–1907) au monastère nestorien en ruines de Bulayīq, ce fonds offre des parallèles avec des *Vitae* des martyrs perses sous Šāpūr II. Dans l'*Histoire de Mār Pethion* (fol. 1–27) ou celle des martyrs perses (fol. 64–69), *tarsāk* prédomine ; néanmoins, une reconstitution en suivi par N. Sims-Williams propose l'équivalence avec le modèle syriaque pour une ligne manquante où Pethion est appelé par ses contradicteurs « chef des nazaréens » (*The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C2* [*Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients : Berliner Turfantexte* 12], Berlin 1985, 47).

retrouvons dans l'onomastique mandéenne pour désigner un chrétien pénitent, *dāhālyā*) n'apparaît jamais dans les sources chrétiennes plus anciennes comme un équivalent pour "chrétien", comme auto-désignation parmi les populations araméophones¹²⁹. L'inscription de la Ka'aba, qui ignore ce nom plus tard commun, suscite notre intérêt pour les deux autres dénominations qui devaient prévaloir à la fin du III^e siècle¹³⁰.

Des sujets de l'empire passés au non-iranisme

L'hypothèse de M.-L. Chaumont présentant la réalité de ces deux appellations de l'inscription de la Ka'aba de Zoroastre comme résultat d'une bipolarité communautaire chrétienne, effet d'un bilinguisme d'origine ethnique¹³¹, est donc quelque peu réductrice. La convergence des matériaux documentaires permet de proposer une nouvelle hypothèse quant à l'identité des groupes désignés par Kirdīr sous ces deux noms. L'importance de l'élément conflictuel dans les rapports

¹²⁹ S. Pinès, constatant l'équivalence de sens entre *tarsākān* et *dhl alohō* a proposé que le terme araméen pouvait être d'usage courant chez les araméens non chrétiens ; ce mot ne se serait pas maintenu dans une littérature chrétienne (syriaque). Il perçoit dans un extrait du *Ginza* une survivance de l'ancienne terminologie. Mais la date des écrits mandéens, composites, reste encore difficile à déterminer. Par ailleurs, l'auteur suggère hâtivement que les membres de cercles de craignants-Dieu ayant des sympathies pour le christianisme, ou y adhérant, auraient continué à être appelés craignants-Dieu. Il en conclut sans appui documentaire que les chrétiens étaient peut-être ainsi désignés parce que nombre d'entre eux étaient eux-mêmes des craignants-Dieu ou fils de craignants-Dieu, ou qu'ils auraient eu comme eux des pratiques similaires. (S. Pinès, « The Iranian Name for Christians and "God-Fearers" », *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 : 7 (1968) 150–151).

¹³⁰ J. de Menasce, « Chronique », *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 171 (1967) 257–256 ; *id.*, *Une apologétique mazdéenne*, 209 ; texte Dd XXXVII, 90–92 (K 35. fol. 146^r). Appendice cap. 15, 225B. Il rappelle la traduction en sogdien des *Actes* de Siméon Bar Sabba'ē dans lesquels *tarsākān* supplée de manière systématique au terme *krīstyonō*, *trś'q'nc* équivalant au syriaque *krīstyonūthō*.

¹³¹ Chaumont, *La christianisation de l'empire iranien* (ci-dessus, n. 1), 117. Elle stipule de façon injustifiée la synonymie *krīstyonē/nāsrāyē* dans les *Actes* de Siméon Bar Sabba'ē.

aux *nāšrāyē* nous paraît essentielle ; d'autres indices de poids permettraient de conférer à ce groupe une dénomination revêtant certains critères politiques et religieux : l'origine de cette tension avec les autorités s'éclaire si nous considérons ces *nāšrāyē* comme des sujets de l'empire iranien passés au non-iranisme du fait de leur conversion au christianisme. Du coup, cette appellation vaudrait aussi bien pour les autochtones convertis que pour les araméens de l'aire géostratégique considérée comme territoire satellite de l'empire sassanide¹³². Ainsi se comprennent les griefs des autorités civiles et religieuses à l'encontre de gens taxés de non loyalisme au sein de l'état national, et ce dans un contexte d'extension de l'influence mazdéenne, en particulier à la cour. Le substantif nazaréen présente le groupe sous l'aspect de sa dépendance à l'égard des faveurs royales, protégé toléré, dans une relation de clientélisme moral ; le principe du don et du contre-don doit alors nécessairement être respecté : le roi dans ses garanties de sécurité, le sujet dans son comportement pacifique et fidèle¹³³. Si les déportés hellénophones implantés dans l'empire se présentent de fait comme non-iraniens, les araméophones déportés ou résidents se considéraient à leur tour comme des étrangers au sein de l'empire. On comprend que les chrétiens d'Iran, en se détournant de la religion du maître du pays, aient été accusés d'un motif politique, celui d'espionnage – tendance

¹³² Sur ce sujet, cf. P. Huyse, « La revendication de territoires achéménides par les sassanides : une réalité historique ? », dans *Questions et connaissances. Actes du 4^e congrès européen des études iraniennes, Paris 6–10 sept. 1999. I, Études sur l'Iran ancien*, Paris 2002, 297–311.

¹³³ Ce système est décryptable dans le cas de Māni au début de son apostolat, mais aussi chez les chrétiens : en butte aux persécutions des mages sous Vahrām II, ceux-ci viendront protester de leurs bonnes intentions à l'égard du pouvoir auprès du souverain : Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite » (ci-dessus, n. 7), 239 [29] ; à en croire le récit de ses *Actes*, Siméon Bar Sabba^cē aurait été un temps un ami de Šāpūr II. J.M. Fiey songe plutôt à l'expression d'une condescendance de la part des seigneurs iraniens, à laquelle répond l'humilité des chrétiens renvoyés à leur statut de sujets soumis, situation comparable à celle des *Dimmi* (*Jalons pour une histoire de l'Église en Iraq* [CSCO 310, *Subsidia* 36], Louvain 1970, 54 n. 44).

qui devait se renforcer avec la promulgation de l'édit de Milan en 313 officialisant le christianisme dans l'empire rival.

Pour la période ultérieure, Ammien Marcellin a retenu quelques figures de Romains intégrés en zone iranienne, et devenus des agents doubles, précieux collaborateurs des Perses (*Rerum Gestarum* XVIII, 6, 16 ; XXIV, 1, 10). P. Peeters rappelle le choix de nomades arabes, souvent marchands, dans des missions d'espionnage transfrontalières par les Romains et les Perses¹³⁴. Dans un article de 1971, N.G. Garsoïan a montré le jeu loyauté/déloyauté en Arménie à même époque à propos des chrétiens¹³⁵. Elle parvient à la conclusion d'une impossible démarcation entre la sphère du religieux et du politique : apostasie est synonyme de trahison et d'infidélité au souverain. Le contexte latent des *Actes* de Siméon Bar Sabba'e (*Passion* texte B) propose cette même corrélation sans division claire entre politique et religieux¹³⁶ ;

¹³⁴ P. Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine* (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 26), Bruxelles 1950, 86–87. Le contrôle des flux marchands sera l'un des enjeux de la défense frontalière lors des traités d'entente. Cf. S.N.C. Lieu qui cite un passage de l'édit d'Honorius et Théodose II de 408–409 selon lequel les marchands sujets des Romains ou du roi des Perses, susceptibles de véhiculer des secrets d'État, devaient être l'objet d'un contrôle rigoureux, assignés pour leurs affaires à des villes spécifiquement désignées comme Nisibe, Callinicum et Artaxata (« Captives, Refugees and Exiles. A Study of Cross-Frontier Civilian Movements and Contacts between Rome and Persia from Valerian to Jovian », dans *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East. Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at the University of Sheffield in April 1986* [BAR 297/2], éd. P. Freeman and D. Kennedy, Oxford 1986, 491).

¹³⁵ N.G. Garsoïan, « Armenia in the Fourth Century. An Attempt to re-define the concepts "Armenia" and "loyalty" », *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, NS 8 (1971) 341–352.

¹³⁶ Le rédacteur anonyme de la passion de Siméon explique les instructions de Šāpūr divulguées dans tout le pays du Bēth-Aramāyē en insistant sur l'équivalence entre nazaréens et amis du César romain : « ... car nous autres, nous n'avons que les ennuis de la guerre et eux (les nazaréens) n'ont que repos et plaisirs ! Ils habitent notre territoire et partagent les sentiments de César, notre ennemi » (*Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* II, 136) ; « Simon veut exciter ses disciples et son peuple à la rébellion contre mon empire. Il veut en faire les esclaves de César, leur coreligionnaire : voilà pourquoi il n'obéit pas à mes ordres » (E. Assemani, *Acta martyrum orientalium*, Rome 1748, 20).

le souci du *mobad* d'évincer tous les éléments gênant son projet unitaire exclut, au nom de l'intérêt national, tout ce qui est susceptible de participer au non-iranisme. Ce motif d'infidélité a pu être constaté à l'encontre des primats de Séleucie-Ctésiphon. Selon certaines sources syriaques considérées, le refus d'obtempérer aux ordres royaux de la capitation est l'un des mobiles d'arrestation des "nazaréens" ; ainsi, sous Šāpūr II, Siméon Bar Sabba'e est-il accusé pour ce motif, l'auteur du récit précisant que cet édit de persécution contre les chrétiens a pour finalité de les soumettre aux lois perses¹³⁷. Siméon, responsable des nazaréens, est donc arrêté pour trahison et son discours cherche à montrer sa loyauté et celle de la communauté qu'il représente envers la royauté et tout l'empire : « Et si seulement nous étions des ennemis ! Il y a parmi nous beaucoup de gens qui sont sûrs d'être les amis de tous les hommes, et spécialement du roi des rois »¹³⁸.

Soixante ans après la mort de Šāpūr, l'historien ecclésiastique Sozomène, qui connaît le syriaque, rapporte comme clef de lecture de la persécution des mobiles similaires, au second livre chapitres XI à XIV ; sa notice pourrait se baser sur un document primitif à l'origine des *Passions* A et B de Siméon¹³⁹. Il insiste sur la loyauté de la communauté face aux « méchants collecteurs [qui] circulaient pour opprimer sous un joug dur la liberté de l'Église » (cf. BHO 1117, §6)¹⁴⁰. Dans la *Vie de Siméon Bar Sabba'e*, le terme nazaréen prononcé par les accusateurs s'apparente à celui de non-mazdéen, étrangers non-iraniens dans l'empire. Cette même vision se dégagerait peut-être du texte fragmentaire P 8823 en moyen-perse ; l'un des hommes inscrit sur la liste de recrutement, contrairement à ses quatre compagnons, est appelé *nazaréen* fils de Dād-Ohrmezdān. Nous retrouvons le même procédé de désignation dans l'inscription de la Ka'aba de Naqš-i Rostam. L'étude

¹³⁷ M. Kmosko, *Martyrium Beati Simeonis Bar Sabba'e*, dans *Patrologia Syriaca* 1/2, Turnhout 1907, 792, §4.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 794–795 ; cf. 818, §18 ; 867, §52.

¹³⁹ Cf. Wiessner, *Untersuchungen* (ci-dessus, n. 62), 148–157.

¹⁴⁰ P. Devos, « Sozomène et les actes syriaques de S. Siméon Šabbā'e », *Analecta Bollandiana* 84 (1966) 455–456.

des variantes textuelles des inscriptions de Kirdīr par Ph. Gignoux a montré des différences orthographiques apparaissant dans des transcriptions de termes *étrangers* : tel est le cas pour de nombreux noms de villes ou de provinces transcrits du grec ou du syriaque¹⁴¹. Or, nous retrouvons cette même difficulté de transcription pour *nāšrāyē*, dont la graphie se diversifie : *n'čl'y* dans la Ka'aba de Zoroastre (l. 10), ainsi qu'à Sar Mašhad (l. 14), mais écrit *[n]'s[l'y]* sur l'inscription de Naqš-i Rustam (l. 30)¹⁴². Ces variantes s'expliquent par les problèmes d'adaptation d'une langue à l'autre, en particulier dans la transcription de termes techniques ou de noms propres qui furent donc importés pour désigner avec précision une minorité spécifique.

Si les chrétiens en général (*krīstyonē*) sont touchés par les mesures de discrimination, il reste que l'emploi spécifique du terme nazaréen recouvre ici ce sens : dans ce contexte de persécution, c'est la vision des détracteurs qui prévaut, impliquant un rejet en bloc des communautés locales de l'empire. Les nazaréens sont taxés de trahison devant le roi. Dans la légende plus tardive de Mār Qardag, le protagoniste porte insulte aux traditions nationales en prêchant le christianisme et en détruisant les lieux de culte zoroastriens¹⁴³. Ce motif associé aux nazaréens applique ici encore au substantif une coloration politique au sein de l'empire. L'inscription de Kirdīr participe à ce même contexte : la première persécution du christianisme en Perse est étroitement liée aux intérêts nationaux. À un moment où se soudait l'unité nationale, qui impliquait l'affermissement du mazdéisme, les minorités religieuses constituaient des facteurs d'instabilité interne, notamment en raison

¹⁴¹ *kłky'y* pour la Cilicie à la Ka'aba de Zoroastre (l. 12) et Naqš-i Rustam (l. 38) ; *[k]łk'y* à Sar Mašhad (l. 18) ; *kysly'y* pour Césarée dans la Ka'aba de Zoroastre (l. 12) ; *kyslyd'y* à Sar Mašhad (l. 18) par exemple.

¹⁴² Gignoux, « Étude des variantes textuelles » (ci-dessus, n. 2), 210.

¹⁴³ Abbeloos, « Acta Mar Kardaghi », (ci-dessus, n. 41), 68.10–13 ; 69.12–13. Cf. l'analyse de A. Guillaumont répertoriant les liens de l'Église de Perse avec l'Occident (« Justinien et l'Église de Perse », *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23–24 [1969–1970] 39–66).

de leur expansion¹⁴⁴. Les chrétiens de l'Anērān, déportés, et ceux de l'empire, passés au non-iranisme par leur conversion, ne formaient pas pour Kirdīr des éléments fiables sur lesquels compter.

La question d'une conversion des mazdéens

La question d'une christianisation précoce des Persans mérite d'être soulevée : une conversion de mazdéens est-elle envisageable ? Al-Ṭabarī évoque l'interdiction faite par la loi perse aux mazdéens de se convertir au christianisme¹⁴⁵. Le zoroastrisme n'est pas naturellement ouvert à un prosélytisme ; la naissance confère le statut religieux. Les témoignages de nos sources sont rares mais les indices ténus révélés ne permettent pas de rejeter entièrement l'impact de mouvements missionnaires en Iran au début du III^e siècle. Le *Livre des Lois des pays* constitue la plus ancienne attestation d'une présence chrétienne dans ces contrées de l'Iran, même s'il ne s'agit pas d'un christianisme établi ou structuré à proprement parler. Ces poches de chrétienté attestent pour le moins d'une pénétration de la doctrine chrétienne, pénétration efficace, suffisamment profonde pour provoquer un changement éthique¹⁴⁶. La diffusion du mouvement baptiste judéo-chrétien vers l'Orient est elle aussi révélatrice : les prosélytes manichéens trouvèrent sans doute, s'égrenant sur le trajet côtier vers l'Inde (ports d'escale des rives du Makrān et du Balouchistan¹⁴⁷), de petites communau-

¹⁴⁴ Scher, « Histoire nestorienne inédite » (ci-dessus, n. 7), 221 [11] ; 223 [13]. Cf. l'étude de Skjærvø « Counter-Manichean Elements » (ci-dessus, n. 16), 313–342.

¹⁴⁵ Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden. Aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari übersetzt*, Leyde 1879, réimpr. Leyde 1973, 287–288.

¹⁴⁶ F. Nau, *Bardesane l'astrologue. Le livre des lois des pays*, Paris 1931², 29 ; trad. 1899, 55–56 (§57). Pour une édition plus récente, cf. H.J.W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Law of the Countries. Dialogue on Fate of Bardesane of Edessa (Semitic Texts with Translations 3)*, Assen 1965 ; pour les rapports entre chrétiens et zoroastriens, cf. A.V. Williams, « Zoroastrians and Christians in Sasanian Iran », *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78/3 (1996) 37–53 ; Ph. Gignoux, « L'identité zoroastrienne et le problème de la conversion », dans *De la Conversion*, éd. J.-C. Attias, Paris 1997, 13–36.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. CMC 144–145 ; Henrichs et Koenen, *op. cit.* (ci-dessus, n. 93), 102–105.

tés judéo-chrétiennes susceptibles d'accueillir la doctrine prêchée¹⁴⁸ ; parmi la population iranienne, des missionnaires ont dû trouver des strates de réceptivité aux idées nouvelles. L'adoption d'éléments el-chasaïtes par des structures communautaires du type de celle du *CMC* fut très certainement l'une des voies et l'un des moyens de l'expansion d'idées chrétiennes dans la région mésopotamienne, babylonienne et plus loin encore dans l'empire. Les flux missionnaires christianisants dans l'empire iranien offrent naturellement au départ une accointance avec le monde marchand, particulièrement porteur : outre les routes classiques qui restaient celles du trafic international, le contact avec ce *milieu* tend à exprimer l'une des réalités du vécu missionnaire. Marcion est l'un de ces exemples pour le II^e siècle ; la littérature apocryphe apostolique s'en fait l'écho¹⁴⁹, ainsi que les premiers élans manichéens (cf. *CMC* 144, 1-145, 16)¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁸ Tardieu, « L'arrivée des manichéens à al-Hīra » (ci-dessus, n. 78), 63. Notons que ces groupes christianisants ne sont pas nécessairement rattachés au courant baptiste, même si cette hypothèse reste néanmoins la plus vraisemblable.

¹⁴⁹ A. Desreumaux, *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus (Apocryphes 3)*, Paris 1993, 126 ; G. Howard, *The Teaching of Addai' (Texts and Translations 16 ; Early Christian Literature Series 4)*, Michigan 1981, 37, trad. 75. Pour la chronologie des rois sassanides, cf. Frye, « The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians », dans *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 178. Cf. C. Jullien et F. Jullien, *Les Actes de Mār Mārī (Apocryphes 11)*, Turnhout 2001, §31. Les *Actes de Thomas* présentent la mission de l'apôtre intimement liée au développement commercial : son itinéraire s'effectue selon les grands axes routiers. Les sources gréco-romaines présentant le trajet terrestre de Thomas l'identifient à celui qui traversait l'Asie centrale septentrionale, coïncidant avec l'un des axes majeurs empruntés par les premiers missionnaires mandatés vers l'Orient.

¹⁵⁰ Les indices de conversion du mazdéisme sont essentiellement restitués dans le cadre restreint des *Acta martyrum*. L'évêque de Karkā d-Bēth Sloq, Šāpūr, subit le martyre lors de la première persécution de Šāpūr II (*Acta sanctorum* Nov. IV, 427–428). De la même région était originaire l'eunuque Guštāzād, mis à mort à la cour du même souverain local par un ancien chrétien iranien rénégat, Varathrān, prêtre du village de Sulqānā (*Acta sanctorum* Nov. IV, 428). Si les textes hagiographiques ne parlent pas beaucoup des rénégats, qui font souvent office de bourreaux, cela ne préjuge en rien du nombre des retours du christianisme au mazdéisme. Cf. aussi la *Passion syriaque du prêtre Jacques et du diacre Āzād* (*Bibliotheca hagiographica orienta-*

Au début du III^e siècle, la tolérance des Arsacides n'opposa aucune difficulté majeure à une prédication éventuelle parmi les populations¹⁵¹. C'est avec la centralisation étatique et la mise en place des structures de l'empire sous les Sassanides, qui réalisent une reconquête et une provincialisation de tout le territoire, que l'affirmation religieuse devient un gage de loyauté politique. La longue catéchèse de Kirdīr sur l'inscription de Naqš-i Rajab révélerait-elle un renouveau religieux dont le *moad* serait l'artisan ? Il est frappant de constater que l'expansion même du christianisme se réalise à un moment où le zoroastrisme devient plus fort et s'impose peu à peu comme religion exclusive. La structure étatique devait encourager plus tard et indirectement l'irani- sation du christianisme en Perse.

lis 423 ; *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* IV, 137–141) ; P. Peeters, « Le “Passionnaire d'Adiabène” », *Analecta Bollandiana* 43 (1925) 284–289. Sous Yazdegerd, nous repérons Mihršābūr, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II, 535–539 ; Phirouz de Bēth-Lapaṭ, mort en 420, *ibid.* III, 208–262. Signalons les martyres de Šīrīn et celui de Machoḏ-lazdbōzēd (*Acta sanctorum* Nov. IV, 205–206) qui apostasient du mazdéisme (le père de Šīrīn est chef des mages) et profanent les pyrées ; cf. P. Devos, « Sainte Sirin, martyre sous Khosrau I^{er} Anosarvan », *Analecta Bollandiana* 64 (1946) 87–131. Nous constatons par ailleurs que des convertis changent leur nom et adoptent un patronyme araméen (syriaque) : ainsi lorsque Aba délaisse la religion de ses pères : P. Peeters, « Observations sur la vie syriaque de Mar Aba, catholicos de l'Église perse (540–552) », *Recherches d'histoire et de philologie orientales* II (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 27), Bruxelles 1951, 118–119. De même, avant sa conversion, Gīwargīs s'appelait Mihrāngušnasp et avait épousé sa sœur, trait de grande piété pour les zoroastriens. Cette dernière, Hazārowāī (Marie), finit par se convertir également (*Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis* 323) ; cf. A.V. Williams, « Zoroastrians and Christians in Sasanian Iran », *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester* 78/3 (1996) 37–53.

¹⁵¹ Jean Chrysostome et Théodoret de Cyr constataient pour le début de leur siècle que la doctrine chrétienne étaient déjà traduite et répandue dans la langue des Perses, et bien disséminée dans l'empire iranien, *PG* 59, 32 ; *PG* 83, 1045 : Théodoret affirme que les Perses connaissent fort bien les évangiles. Un passage de l'*Histoire ecclésiastique* de l'historien Sozomène impute la conversion d'Arméniens et de Perses à des contacts avec les Osroéniens, et ce de très bonne heure (*HE* II, 8 ; cf. VIII, 1–2) ; A.-J. Festugière et al., *Sozomène. Histoire ecclésiastique* II (*Sources Chrétiennes* 306), Paris 1983, 264–265 ; cf. aussi *PG* 47, 956.

L'opposition Ērān/Ānērān

Les deux entités distinctes Ērān (*Šahr i Ērān* ou *Ērānšahr*) et Ānērān s'opposent sur le plan ethnique ; l'Ānērān, aux frontières fluctuantes, comprenait l'ensemble des territoires peuplés de non-iraniens annexés par la conquête à l'Empire iranien¹⁵². La notion antithétique d'Ērān et d'Ānērān que l'on trouve exprimée dans la géographie des inscriptions de Kirdīr est en totale conformité avec la titulature royale des époques précédentes. En effet, Šāpūr I^{er} adopta le titre de « roi des rois d'Ērān et d'Ānērān » ; d'après V.G. Lukonin, cette expression aurait probablement été adoptée au retour des campagnes en Occident¹⁵³. Son successeur Hormizd I^{er} (Ardašīr) reprend cette proclamation lors de son couronnement, et une de ses monnaies en porte trace¹⁵⁴. Il reste difficile de savoir si les souverains suivants portant le nom de Vahrām se prévalèrent également de ce titre. Après Vahrām III, Narseh se proclame encore « roi des rois d'Ērān et d'Ānērān » et frappe monnaie avec cette légende¹⁵⁵. Le mage Kirdīr oppose les deux entités territoriales ; à Sar Mašhad comme à Naqš-i Rostam, il souligne le nombre de feux et de corporations de mages établis ou réinstallés par ses soins diligents, tant dans l'Ērān que dans l'Ānērān, c'est-à-dire « la ville d'Antioche, le pays de Syrie et ce qui dépend de la province de Syrie » (extension occidentale et septentrionale)¹⁵⁶. Dans son pro-

¹⁵² Pour des précisions de vocabulaire, cf. G. Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran : An Essay on its Origin* (Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente : Serie Orientale Roma 67), Rome 1989. Cf. J. Marquart, *A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ērānšahr* (*Analecta Orientalia* 3), Rome 1931, introduction.

¹⁵³ V.G. Lukonin, « Political, Social and Administrative Institutions : Taxes and Trade », *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3/2, 731 ; E. Yarshater, « Iranian National History », *ibid.*, 411. Cf. Ph. Gignoux, *Glossaire des inscriptions pehlevies et parthes* (*Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum : Supplementary Series* 1), Londres 1972, s.v. « 'nyl'n (Ānērān) » et « 'nyl'nštry (pays d'Ānērān) » : il recense notamment cette dénomination dans une inscription de Šāpūr I^{er} à Tang i-Borāq (l. 2).

¹⁵⁴ Duchesne-Guillemin, « Zoroastrian Religion » (ci-dessus, n. 8), 880.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 884.

¹⁵⁶ Ph. Gignoux, « L'inscription de Kartir à Sar Mašhad », *Journal Asiatique* 261 (1968) 396, §17 ; *id.*, *Les quatre inscriptions* (ci-dessus, n. 5), 71, §15. Il évoquait

jet d'unification religieuse, Kirdīr reste conscient de la menace représentée par des doctrines à visée universaliste pour l'intégrité interne de l'empire (judaïsme, christianisme, bouddhisme, manichéisme...). Mais soulignons que la religion mazdéenne ne comporte aucune ambition de ce type. C'est une évolution très lente et graduelle qui aboutit à la formation d'une Église nationale sans que l'on puisse véritablement parler d'une religion d'État représentée par la figure royale. Les recherches de G. Gnoli et de Ph. Gignoux ont rappelé que cette notion de religion d'État pour le mazdéisme à l'époque sassanide est inadéquate¹⁵⁷ : la relation du religieux et du politique est intrinsèquement liée au concept même d'iranité dans un sens ethnique et religieux ; elle repose sur une différenciation par rapport à tout ce qui n'est pas iranien (le troisième livre du *Dēnkard* établit des niveaux de séparation, *judāgīh* : interdiction de se marier avec des non-iraniens, de rendre un culte aux dieux étrangers, de fréquenter les non-mazdéens et d'honorer les mauvais¹⁵⁸). Les deux chercheurs estiment que l'alliance sacrée entre la religion mazdéenne et l'État est un thème littéraire postérieur

déjà dans une note trop brève la possibilité d'une distinction territoriale à l'origine de la double appellation, *ibid.*, 70 n. 138.

¹⁵⁷ G. Gnoli, «Iran als religiöser Begriff im Mazdaismus», *Vorträge G 320. Rheinische-Westphälische Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Opladen 1993, 1–31. Ph. Gignoux, «L'identité zoroastrienne et le problème de la conversion», dans *De la Conversion*, éd. J.-C. Attias, Paris 1997, 17. Cf. J. Wiesehöfer, «"Geteilte Loyalitäten". Religiöse Minderheiten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rom und dem sāsānidischen Iran», *Klio* 75 (1993) 362–382. Ces positions permettent de réviser l'hypothèse de J.P. de Menasce, «La conquête de l'Iranisme et la récupération des mages hellénisés», *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études (section des Sciences religieuses)* 1956–1957, Paris 1957, 2–12. Il entrevoyait en effet une politique évangélisatrice de Kirdīr envers les «pays de mission» dans les territoires conquis de l'Ānērān aussi bien qu'à l'intérieur du pays. Cette action est envisagée comme distincte, du moins en théorie, de la politique de répression des autres religions.

¹⁵⁸ *Dēnkard* III, 143, 20–144, 6 ; Gignoux, «L'identité zoroastrienne», 16–17. Les souverains n'honorèrent pas toutes ces prescriptions, et même, certains les contredirent par leur mariage (Khosrau II), leur conciliation avec des minorités religieuses (Šāpūr I, Yazdegerd I), ou même leur hostilité à l'égard de la hiérarchie

à l'époque sassanide, développé sous l'influence de l'islam pour protéger l'ancienne religion officielle et dominante. Le projet d'un "zoroastrisme d'État" que prévoyait Kirdīr s'effectuait en parallèle à l'unité administrative et politique royale¹⁵⁹, à un moment où celle-ci se trouvait précisément menacée : par des facteurs externes d'une part puisque vers 283, l'empereur Carus et son fils Numérien pénètrent sur le territoire jusqu'à Ctésiphon, et internes d'autre part avec la rébellion d'Hormizd, le propre frère de Vahrām II¹⁶⁰.

Nous savons que dès l'implantation des déportés grecs par Šāpūr I^{er}, les souverains avaient intérêt à gratifier les exilés dont ils attendaient beaucoup en matière économique. La *Chronique de Séert* signale d'ailleurs les conditions favorables dont bénéficièrent ces chrétiens. Cette situation optimale pour une installation durable incitait les artisans à s'intéresser au développement d'un pays dans lequel ils se sentirent intégrés : « Leurs affaires prospérèrent en Perse et ils eurent une situation plus aisée que dans leur pays » (*Chronique de Séert* 1/2, 222 [12], avec rappel du Psaume 105, 46 : « J'ai mis pour eux la miséricorde dans le cœur de ceux qui les ont amenés en captivité »). Mais force est de constater que tous les captifs ne bénéficièrent pas des mêmes conditions, ce que le texte induit par l'emploi d'un démonstratif : « Dieu gratifia ces Romains de l'amitié des Perses » (223 [13]).

Cette volonté politique du roi des rois tenait compte du poids social que représentaient ces communautés chrétiennes au sein de l'empire, mais aussi de l'aubaine qu'elles pouvaient constituer pour l'essor des villes : les artisans ne participaient pas aux campagnes militaires, et jouaient, par leur habileté technique, un rôle de plus

mazdéenne (Hormizd IV), cf. Gignoux, « Church State Relations » (ci-dessus, n. 3), 79.

¹⁵⁹ Dans son *Histoire d'Arménie*, Élisée Vartabed présente le premier ministre délégué du roi de Perse comme « gouverneur suprême de l'Ērān et de l'Ānērān » : Langlois, *Collection* (ci-dessus, n. 58), I, 190b.

¹⁶⁰ A.D.H. Bivar, « The History of Eastern Iran », *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3/1, 210 ; Frye, « The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians », *ibid.*, 3/1, 128. C'est sous le successeur de l'empereur, Dioclétien, que la Perse récupérera ses anciens territoires de Mésopotamie et une partie de l'Arménie.

en plus important dans les rouages économiques et l'accroissement des richesses étatiques. Le *mobad* Kirdīr, qui amorçait alors sous Šāpūr I^{er} le tout début d'une carrière prestigieuse, connaissait donc l'intérêt national porté par le pouvoir envers le savoir-faire de ces déportés. Une nuance essentielle dut ainsi s'imposer, dans l'intervalle des seize années du règne de Vahrām II (qui connut la toute-puissance de Kirdīr) : à ces chrétiens non-iraniens, étrangers considérés comme des "Grecs" de l'empire romain oriental, atout nécessaire pour le pays, étaient associés les nazaréens, essentiellement des chrétiens araméophones confondus quant à leur statut avec les autochtones convertis, passés, eux, au non-iranisme (et donc suspects d'infidélité, nous l'avons vu). Lors de la persécution dans le Ḥūzistān déclenchée en 340–341 par Šāpūr II, les *Actes de martyrs* précisent que furent épargnés, « seuls de tout l'Orient », les « fils des Grecs » déplacés. Parmi les victimes, la plupart portent de fait des noms syriaques, d'autres sont des persans¹⁶¹. Ce trait montre à l'évidence que les souverains sassanides, dans le courant des déportations, savaient faire une distinction inter-sociologique, et établir des différences internes au sein du même groupe des chrétiens.

Les indices recherchés contribuent à mettre en valeur un « jeu de la frontière » qui participe de la définition même de la communauté chrétienne de l'empire iranien aux époques arsacide et sassanide. Les motivations politiques, avec les interférences religieuses intrinsèques, expliquent à elles seules l'emploi de deux termes par les autorités sassanides pour désigner les chrétiens, constatation qui s'impose de l'analyse des sources syriaques sur la longue durée.

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¹⁶¹ J.M. Fiey, « Communautés syriaques en Iran des premiers siècles à 1552 », *Commémoraison Cyrus. Actes du congrès de Shiraz 1971. Hommage universel (Acta Iranica 3)*, Téhéran et Liège 1974, 283.

WHAT DO WE EXPERIENCE IF WE HAVE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?

PETER ANTES

Summary

The starting point of the paper is the historical fact that people who have special forms of religious experience such as seeing saints, angels, gods or goddesses can always say whom they saw. They never met anyone totally unknown to them. The question is why. The answer that the paper proposes and invites to discuss is that having experience means to identify what is happening with what is known as pattern of interpretation. The knowledge of those patterns is due either to socialisation or to further studies in favour of, or against, those patterns, yet, it is unlikely that something totally new will ever be discovered through those forms of religious experience.

Context related interpretation of mystical experience is well known in Psychology of Religion. In particular, secular and religious patterns of interpretation compete with each other. A significant case is the comparison between Madeleine Le Bouc of France who died in 1921 and the Indian great mystic Ramakrishna who died in 1886. While the former was described by her medical doctor Professor Pierre Janet as a specific example of madness, the latter was, in the collection of his life and teachings, presented by his disciples as a saint. Looking at both more closely it does not seem unlikely to state that they had similar types of experience which, according to their surrounding milieus, found very different explanations: a medical one in terms of mental illness in the secular context of France, and a religious one in the Indian context of Hindu spirituality.¹

The intention of this contribution, however, is to look at religious contexts only in emphasising two aspects, one empirical and the other

¹ Cf. Catherine Clément, *Sudhir Kakar: Der Heilige und die Verrückte. Religiöse Ekstase und psychische Grenzerfahrung*, München: Beck 1992.

one theoretical. The empirical first one is based on an observation which is objectively testified and therefore needs some explanation. The theoretical second one is the attempt to offer an explanation for the observation if true. Both are meant as an invitation to further discussion in the field of Psychology of Religion. Consequently, the first following section will ask what are the facts and the second will try to say how to explain them.

1. What are the facts?

In all religious traditions there are numerous examples of people who claim to have had specific religious experience like seeing god(s), goddesses, angels, devils or saints. The number of stories of this kind is such that the belief in these apparitions has been an empirical fact of most of the religious traditions over the centuries. The defender, therefore, would argue that some truth should be in that. Visions of normally invisible supernatural beings or of dead men and women are certain because of so many witnesses in the history of religions.

A review of all the material I have collected over the years led me to the conclusion that all the texts that have come to my knowledge gave precise names to the persons that were seen and that these names were, moreover, all known to those who saw them. In other words, it seems that no one ever saw a person who was totally unknown in the respective religious context where the apparition took place. Accordingly, in Hindu circles people use to see Kali or Durga, while in Christian contexts, if the vision is that of a woman, St. Mary is seen instead. The observation that is the starting point of this contribution is therefore that the ones who are seen are always known in the respective contexts of the seers. This is a fact.

The fact can be empirically tested: it can be either falsified or verified case by case. The challenge, consequently, is to ask all readers of relevant texts as well as the listeners to oral reports of this kind whether or not they have ever come across a single case that contradicts the observation on which this contribution is based. Cases that contradict this observation are welcome and will be discussed in detail in order to show whether the observation can still be defended as

a thesis or whether it should be given up because of undeniable facts that do not allow to maintain it any longer.

To indicate the possible discussion of facts in contradiction with the observation two examples may be given which seem to falsify the observation. Both are taken from the Christian Bible, from the Acts of the Apostles of the New Testament.

The first example is Paul's conversion to Christ. In Acts 9:1–22 Paul is described as a strict opponent to the first Christians' belief in Jesus. It is reported that while persecuting them Saul, who later became Paul, had an experience which he interpreted as Christ appearing to him in order to tell him that persecution should be stopped and Saul/Paul should become one of his followers instead of being among the opponents. Though Saul/Paul had not believed in Jesus Christ, he was not unknown to Saul/Paul when he identified the vision with him. On the contrary, the fact of persecuting his followers indicates an intensive, though negative, interest in Jesus and his claims. The light event, interpreted as the apparition of Jesus, suddenly changed Paul's mind and led to his conversion. This event is no argument against the main thesis of this section because what appeared was not culturally totally unknown to Paul before his conversion.

The second example, again taken from the Acts of the Apostles, concerns Paul's reference to the Unknown God to whom an altar was dedicated in Hellenistic Athens (cf. Acts 17:23). It shows the Greeks' open-mindedness and their readiness to cope with peoples of different religious cultures who needed to be integrated by offering them means to bring their gods into the polytheistic world of the Roman Empire. The Unknown God in this case was without any precise shape and thus open to interpretation and adaptation. It was not a result of religious experience through which an until then totally unknown God revealed himself as the one who appeared and was seen. Consequently, this example is not in contradiction either with the observation that is the main point of this section.

The main thesis of this section is the observation that all the different apparitions found in the history of religions are figures that are known

in the religious contexts in which they appear. This is an empirical fact that may be tested through case by case verification or falsification.

Starting from this observation as an empirical fact one will ask why this is so. The next section will therefore try to give an answer to that question in terms of a theory which follows Hjelmar Sundén's line of interpretation with some modifications.²

2. *How to explain the facts?*

If the observation is true that people seeing apparitions use to identify them with figures known in their own religious contexts, so that Hindus use to recognise Kali or Durga while Catholics usually see St. Mary, such forms of identification need to be explained. The proposal is to divide the identification process into three clearly distinguishable steps:

The first step is the vision of something hardly recognisable, often some rather imprecise ray of light that causes joy or fear and invites a closer look at what is going on. It is just "light" as St. Augustine (d. 430) said in his *Confessions* (VII, 10), or nothing but "fire" as expressed in Pascal's (d. 1662) *Mémorial*, or "great luminous waves were rising"³ as described by Ramakrishna in his vision of Kali, the divine mother.

The next step is an idea that comes to the mind of the seer. It is in the case of St. Augustine the idea that God is appearing here. In the case of Pascal again, it is the idea of God but more precisely not the God of philosophers but the one of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the case of Ramakrishna it is this "ocean of the Spirit, boundless, dazzling," "an ocean of ineffable joy" that is "the presence of the Divine Mother."⁴

² For the following I mainly rely on what I already suggested in my lecture *How to study religious experience in the traditions: Second Annual BASR lecture* (British Association for the Study of Religions, Occasional Papers 5), The Open University in Wales, 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF1 9SA, UK., n.d. [1992].

³ Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama 1960⁶, 33.

⁴ *Ib.*

The third step is the identification of the idea with what is seen so that the hardly recognisable unclear vision of light takes concrete shape and shows more precise forms that correspond to traditional patterns of presentation of these figures in their purest forms.

It seems that the combination of steps II and III is the decisive moment to make the apparition meaningful because it is both well known and deeply experienced in a unique way of religious experience. If such an identification process does not take place, the vision remains uninterpreted and thus meaningless to the seer and will soon be without great relevance for the future. When, however, it finds its place in the seer's reference system, it will have an impact on all that follows.

The identification process seems to work in both directions: it helps to give more details regarding the apparition and it encourages the seer to look for certain elements that are typical of the specific vision of the holy or devilish figure according to the background knowledge of the reference system. As a result a great number of iconographical elements will be detected in the apparition and confirm that the presumption regarding the appearing figure is correct. If so, it means that the apparition is not yet completed from the beginning but it is itself in a construction process thanks to icononological and dogmatic teachings that have their influence on the seer. In other words, if this interpretation key is correct, it supposes an active participation on behalf of the seer in the apparition itself. The seer is thus not only a passive spectator who is overwhelmed by what is going on, but there is a considerable amount of constructive investigation based on what has been learnt from the traditions about what is appearing. The knowledge of those patterns is either due to socialisation in a religious setting or to studies in favour of, or against, those patterns, in any case it is learnt and not produced by the apparition itself.

The interpretation key that is proposed here is not reductive as are so many others. It does not express any concrete judgement on whether the first step of experience is purely due to inner developments of the seer or whether the initiative and inspiration come from the outside. The answer to this goes beyond what can be done in the study of religion and enters the domain of belief. What is needed for a neutral

description is only that no decision is taken in this respect and that all answers remain possible because the methods of our discipline do not allow us to decide this question and therefore we should not go further than we can.

Leaving room for possible interventions from the outside does not mean that we pay no attention to the empirical fact that those apparitions are described in context related terms of a tradition so that what has been learnt from the tradition seems to shape decisively what is experienced. Consequently the answer to what we do experience if we have religious experience is clear: we experience very deeply what we have learnt as the interpretation patterns of religious experience. If this is so, it is also obvious that people who have not learnt or accepted religious patterns of interpretation will consequently not have religious experience and will use secular keys of interpretation for what is experienced by themselves or by others, as is exemplified by the famous case mentioned above of Madeleine Le Bouc who was seen as being mad, while Ramakrishna, who had a similar experience, was considered in his context to be a Hindu saint.

Conclusion

The preceding two paragraphs emphasise two different aspects of interpretation concerning religious experience:

The first aspect is empirical, namely the fact that people who see apparitions recognise them as figures with whom they are familiar from their religious socialisation or studies. The implication of that is to say that never unknown gods, goddesses, angels, saints and so forth have been seen. What is seen is already known to the seer. That was the main thesis of that section. It must be tested empirically and calls for case by case verification or falsification.

The second aspect is theoretical. It takes the main thesis of the first section as a fact and tries to explain it by dividing the identification process of the apparition into three clearly distinguishable steps: a first impression of a hardly recognisable apparition, an idea of who it could be, according to the seer's knowledge about religious matters, and an attempt to identify the apparition with the idea by finding its

iconographical elements so that the vision takes concrete shape to justify the presumption. Consequently, what is seen is already known to the seer, anyone else has never been sighted in the history of religions. What is experienced is a specific deepening of knowledge gathered before the event thanks to religious socialisation or to relevant studies in favour of, or against, those patterns of interpretation. The explanation is not reductive, it leaves room for intervention from the outside and does not reduce what is happening to the seer's psyche alone. It claims, however, that experience is not independent from knowledge and thus combined with socialisation and studies. It therefore seems to be unlikely as well as empirically unattested that culturally totally unknown apparitions will be seen.

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PETER ANTES

BOOK REVIEWS

KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie. Jüdische und christliche Beiträge zum antiken Zeitverständnis* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, 49)—Berlin: de Gruyter 2000 (XVIII + 912 p.) ISBN 3110166410 (hb.) EUR 198:00.

The introduction (I: pp. 2–11) describes briefly but precisely the current state of research. To understand the definition of the subject requires, however, a careful reading of ch. II (14–101) on “Geschichte als Kommunikation: Methodische Grundlegung.” Here the author places his subject, the relevance of astrology for religion in late antiquity, within the frame of cultural history and, particularly within the history of cosmology and the perception of time and history. Based on that circumspect methodological consideration the author scrutinizes in the following chapters a series of concrete phenomena which according to the available sources determined the role of astrology in the Jewish realms of antiquity. It is particularly that challenging contrast between these thoughtful theoretical presuppositions at the beginning of the book and the following concentration on sources and their analysis which characterizes this important contribution to the history of religions in late antiquity. Notwithstanding these theoretical presuppositions, one of the main characteristics of the book is its reluctance regarding the usual reconstruction of a history of astrology in the sense of speculative “Geistesgeschichte” (like Gabriele Boccaccini’s “Enochism,” for example) without, however, denying the existence of “scientific” traditions in certain circles. The author preferred to look for the political—historical and sociological settings of the extant astrological testimonies, a comparatively realistic and convincing approach. Consequently, von Stuckrad begins his analysis of sources not with the astronomical book of Enoc but first of all with the applications of a biblical passage for political and historiographical purposes.

Ch. III (105–158) concerns, therefore, Num 2:17 as “agens” of Jewish politics and claims for predominance beginning with the Hasmonean era and culminating in the Bar Kokhba revolt. Ch. IV (160–222) is an excellent analysis of the role of Astrology and priestly theology in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Ch. V (224–310) describes Astrology in the light of Jewish historiography, ch. VI (317–430) astrological evidence in “intertestamental” Jewish

Literature, ch. VII (4322–542) astrology in Rabbinical discourse, ch. VIII (543–623) astrology within the Christian canon, ch. IX (624–695) astrology in the gnostic context, and ch. X (796–766) Manichaean astrology. The ch. XI (767–800) is devoted to anti-astrological discourse in Patristic theology. The short last chapter XII (801–815) is a masterpiece of scholarly definition of results regarding a period of ca. one millennium of religious history in various areas. This concluding chapter contains: 1. “Metastrukturen” of the discourse in antiquity: the structure of analogy, the cultic-theological structure, the magical-mystical structure, systems of time calculation, fate and free will, the structure of religious propaganda. 2. Local foci of the discourse; Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia. Last not least: this book includes valuable insights into the relevance of popular concepts and their inter-religious applications. In the case of Judaism of late antiquity (and, of course, Christianity) it is particularly the significance of the Egyptian heritage which emerges as a decisive factor. Pp. 816–820 contain a list of abbreviations, pp. 821–824 a list of source materials, pp. 825–854 a comprehensive bibliography, p. 855 a list of astrological symbols, pp. 856–859 a (very useful) glossary of astrological termini technici, pp. 860–875 astrological tabellae of the appearances of comets and graphic schemes of conjunctions. Indices of sources (pp. 876ff.), names (pp. 888ff.) and subjects (pp. 898–912) enable the reader to utilize this voluminous but nevertheless readable masterpiece of scholarly competence and outstanding example for the art of writing in humanities.

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JOHANN MAIER

MARIA GRAZIA LANCELOTTI, *The Naassenes. A Gnostic Identity Among Judaism, Christianity, Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Traditions* (Forschungen zur Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte, 35)—Münster: Ugarit Verlag 2000 (416 p.) ISBN 3-927120-97-9.

Our knowledge about the Gnostics is partly built on primary sources. Chief among them are those texts which were found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. In addition to the primary sources, there also exist critical reports made by the theologians of the early church. In recent years, the Nag Hammadi sources have received much attention, the secondary sources less. While the church-fathers' reports are windows through which gnostic systems

and groups can be glimpsed, they give distorted reflections. Some of them, however, are obviously close to original sources. This is the case, for instance, with Hippolytus of Rome when he describes the sect of the Naassenes. It is important that also these sources continue to be used in the study of the phenomenon of gnosticism.

The Italian scholar Maria Grazia Lancellotti has recently made Hippolytus' report on the Naassenes the subject of her doctoral thesis. The book under review here is an extensive revision of this thesis. Lancellotti wants to "reconstruct and analyse the ideological and doctrinal system that underlies the document of Hippolytus (*Ref.* V 6–11) on the Gnostic sect of the Naassenes" (p. vii). To obtain her goal she has both made an in-depth reading of the Naassene text and compared it with related gnostic and other sources.

The Naassene system is Christian, but to a great extent also based on an exegesis of pagan mythology. Attis, for instance, figures prominently in this system, and many other deities as well. The name of the sect—Naassenes—from the Hebrew for serpent (*nahash*), is due to the importance of the serpent in the mythology and thought of the sect. This serpent is conceived of as the Logos which acts as an *anima mundi*, giving life as well as salvation. The Naassene religious system is tripartite with three roots of reality—noetic, psychic and choic. In creation, these elements have become mixed, and the *mixis* was not according to the divine plan. Man is a creature made by inferior powers, but includes in himself noetic elements. The world is conceived of as a prison and the goal is to escape material existence and become a spiritual being (*pneumatikos*).

In opposition to most scholars who during the last century have worked on the Naassenes, Lancellotti wants to show that no pagan basic document lies behind the text of Hippolytus. According to her it has a consistent ideology and is from the beginning an authentic gnostic document. To obtain her goal, she proceeds by four stages. In part I of the book, Lancellotti describes the contents and the formation of the text. In part II she analyses it with the purpose of laying bare its ideology. In part III, she compares the Naassene system with other systems based on three principles. Finally in part IV, she analyses the hermeneutical and exegetical principles applied by the Naassenes. This part also includes a comparison with the *Gospel of Thomas*.

Lancellotti does a good job at showing the internal consistency of the text and its ideology. Fruitful is also how she points out that the Naassenes

systematically used pagan religious traditions in a syncretistic way and sought to identify the true meaning behind these pagan traditions. These were meanings which the original users of the tradition did not know. One example is how the Naassenes explain why phalluses are placed outside temples. According to them, the phallus symbolizes Hermes/Logos which was also identified with the serpent, the intermediary principle in creation. Because of the importance of this principle, the serpent had got such a central place. The Naassenes also relate the term for serpent, *naas*, to the term for temple, *naos*. The Naassenes are a striking illustration of how some Christian groups included pagan myths and cult in their exegetical project.

A main problem with gnostic texts is that it is difficult to move from intra-textual readings to extra-textual realities. How did these texts function within a socio-cultural system? Lancellotti discusses these questions and tries to reconstruct a milieu and a place for the Naassene sect by identifying an historical and geographical background for them in the Syrio-Mesopotamian area and on the Euphrates. The Naassenes identified the Euphrates with the cosmic serpent, and the river seems to have played an important role in their ritual of baptism and in their mythology.

Gnostic texts are never easy to grasp. Lancellotti has through a sober use of sources and a systematic treatment of her subject managed to give a trustworthy picture of the ideology of the Naassenes and provided useful suggestions as to their provenance. Anybody interested in the religious development in the Roman empire in the first centuries CE will find this book illuminating. Behind the apparent strangeness of the Naassenes, we recognize traits which are typical for several of the religious movements in these centuries. Not least does this pertain to the use of a sophisticated exegesis which worked syncretistically with the aim of creating a united perspective to include a wide range of sources.

The book also includes useful indices of proper names, historical characters and communities, toponyms and ethnic designations, ancient authors and quotations. It is hereby recommended.

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INGVILD SÆLID GILHUS

SYLVIA MARCOS (Ed.), *Gender/Bodies/Religions* (Adjunct Proceedings of The XVIIth Congress for the History of Religions)—México: Aler Publications 2000 (363 p.) ISBN 968-7866-03-9 (pbk.).

Gender/Bodies/Religions, edited by Sylvia Marcos, takes us on a tour of the world through the experiences of women linked to different religious traditions. From at least three continents, the voices and experiences of women of different religious traditions are analysed from various theoretical perspectives, resulting in important insights as much for feminist theory as for religious sociology and anthropology.

In this anthology Sylvia Marcos has put together works which continue the feminist-developed analysis of the body and the way in which it has been converted into an arena in dispute for the control of woman sexuality and feminine identity. Many feminist studies have questioned the existence of the body as something natural and merely biological, since our concepts of it—and the concepts promoted by science and religion—are framed by culture. Nevertheless, until now, most feminist studies have been centered on the analysis of the body from a Western point of view, and in many cases from the analysis of science as a discourse of power whose representations legitimise exclusions and inequality. *Gender/Bodies/Religions* offers a new perspective on this debate by including analysis of discourses and religious practices which construct the female body in different cultural contexts.

However, the cultural diversity which the book embraces, while it enriches the debate, also encounters several methodological and epistemological problems which amount to the analysis (and to a certain extent the judgement) of systems of inequality or strategies of resistance from a Western academic tradition—systems and strategies constructed in the frame of other cultural values and world-views. The tension between the idealisation of non-western societies on the part of some scholars, and the perspectives of those who emphasise the oppression of non-western women, seeing them only as victims, and denying any possibility of their being social agents, is present in many gender studies which are carried out in non-western contexts.

Through the essays gathered in this volume do not resolve this dilemma, some of them do make (implicitly or explicitly) some methodological proposals to break free of this dichotomy. The Philippine priestesses known as *Babaylan*, analyzed by Fe Magahas, Milagros Guerrero, and Consolación Aras; the Mapuche healers, known as *Machis*, whose practices are analyzed by Ana Mariella Bacigalupo; the traditional Indian midwives or *Dais*, whose

experiences are portrayed by Janet Chawala; the Malayan healer or *Bomoh*, about whom Carol Lederman writes; or the spiritualist women described by Sylvia Ortiz have found an empowering space in their ritual roles. In many cases they have confronted the gender roles established by institutional religions, and some of them, like the *Machis Mapuches* and the Philippine *Babaylan*, have even questioned the link between sexuality and gender-identity by assuming several identities, both male and female, regardless of their own sexuality. Nevertheless, all of them have encountered the limits set by the hegemonic culture or the institutional religion, which in one way or another try to place them back in the gender roles they consider normal, valid, and permitted by the patriarchal ideology. The methodological challenge that the gender studies of popular and institutional religions face is able to recognise these limits without denying the importance of the empowering spaces won by women. In my opinion, this book makes important contributions in this sense; its proposals, its limitations, and even its silences need to be taken into account in future studies of gender and religion.

CIESAS

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SUE BLUNDELL AND MARGARET WILLIAMSON (Eds.), *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*—London and New York: Routledge 1998 (X + 192 p.) ISBN 0-415-12662-2 (hb.) £40.00, ISBN 0-415-12663-0 (pbk) £12.99.

The title might suggest a more theoretical approach. But the book assembles a series of case studies, united by the unbroken thread that all deal with Greek religion focussing on female roles. These may be goddesses, heroines or real women participating in rituals and even men disguising as women. So each article is contributing some facet to a complex image of the role of women in Greek religion, each of them being of some theoretical impact. Taken together the book is an interesting contribution to gender studies in the area of religious research. The reader, even if not acquainted with classics, will find well presented papers understandable also for non-specialists.

Treating “The Gamos of Hera,” Isabelle Clark examines how different rituals and their myths are celebrating various aspects of this marriage deity,

who is at the same time patron of mortal brides and wives, director of transition rituals for girls, and a poliadic and political goddess. Susan Guettel Cole's main interest in the role of "Domesticating Artemis" is the symbolic parallel between the liminal state of female initiands and the marginality of the locations where transition rituals and worship of the goddess take place. According to Sue Blundell the "Narratives on the Parthenon" show a theme full of tension: "Marriage and the Maiden," which means at the same time the acknowledgment of marriage as an important social institution and the praise of a heroic tradition, whose representative was the virgin Athene. Looking at representations of the birth of goddesses in ancient Greece, Lesley Beaumont asks: "Born Old or Never Young?", for there are many examples of gods as infants, but Athene and Aphrodite are adult from beginning, which is probably due to their definition by the sexual status (as virgin, sex symbol, or, in other cases, wife, and mother). "The Nature of Heroines" is questioned by Emily Kearns. Subordinate associate of a hero, prototype of girls in their transition rites, paramour or rape victim of a god (and by that mother of a hero), even inventor of women's work and (as first priestess) institutor of a cult—the heroine is a representative of a variety of social functions transposed to another plane of existence. When Karen Stears examines "Gender and Athenian Death Ritual" she comes to the conclusion: "Death Becomes Her." The important role women play in lamentations like in other ritual functions of the private sphere is enhancing their status. At the same time it supports the ideology of the emotional, illogical nature of women. "In the Mirror of Dionysos" Richard Seaford discovers a symbol for the liminal stage used in mystic initiation. The perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis gives him insights in very interesting examples (prominent Pentheus in the *Bacchae*) where the mirror shows images of inversion on its way to become a medium of self-recognition. Eager in his attempt to destroy the "fertility paradigm," N.J. Lowe seeks to explain the transmission of the sources concerning the "Thesmophoria and Haloa" without reaching a convincing interpretation of the women's festival for which taking into account just the fertility symbolism is indispensable. This means a disappointing end to an inspiring book.

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DOROTHEA BAUDY

DAVID FRANKFURTER, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*—Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000 (315 p.) ISBN 0691070547 (pbk.) \$ 16.95.

One of the main scopes of F(rankfurter')s book is to show that religion in Roman Egypt (30 BCE – 642 CE) was alive and thriving. F. rightly attacks the evolutionist position that takes christianization as a necessary consequence of an alleged decline of pagan religion.

In order to prove his view, F. has collected evidence that is apt to show the continuing involvement not only of the priests but also of the Egyptian population mainly in the rural areas of the *chora*. It is the respective religious activities and mutual interactions of these two groups that constitute what F. calls 'religion in Roman Egypt.' The author brings forward a variety of examples taken from papyrological, literary (classical and Coptic), and archaeological sources. These examples concern religious activities connected with the temples (ch. 2), the local cults of 'indigenous' gods (ch. 3), local and regional oracular practice (ch. 4), the varying roles of religious specialists (ch. 5), the production of literary and religious texts in the temple scriptoria (ch. 6), and, finally, the ritual and iconoclastic destruction of the old (pagan) religious and cultural order and the inauguration of the new (Christian) one (ch. 7). In fact, contrary to what the title suggests, it is the process of christianization the author is mostly concerned with (p. 9).

The inherent logic of the author's concentration on 'priests' and 'peasants' as religious agents becomes clear only with a knowledge of F.'s methodological background. Most important in this respect is the 'Great' and the 'Little Traditions' theory first established in the 1950s by the Chicago anthropologists Robert Redfield and MacKim Marriott. Their focus was on so called 'peasant communities' in Mexico and India. They tried to describe these cultures in terms of an interaction of the 'Great Tradition' consisting of literature, the arts, philosophy, monumental architecture etc., and the 'Little Tradition' consisting of the every-day life of peasant communities.

By adopting this approach, F. is able to offer some novel perspectives: according to him, the development of religion in Roman Egypt is not necessarily equivalent to the economic decline of the great temple centres; the difference between 'priestly' and 'magical' religious activities was much slighter than is often assumed; the phenomenon of iconoclasm can profitably be interpreted in terms of Victor Turner's 'social drama' (cf. p. 281); oracular practice is the result of a conscious individual choice rather than a symptom

of a presumed Late Antique mentalité of anxiety; christianization is a process the success of which is difficult to imagine without taking into account pre-existing local pagan religious structures.

However, the approach chosen by F. also creates serious problems (for a more comprehensive discussion of these and related issues cf. M. Haase, *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 6/2, 2002; in print). To this reader, one of the main problems is that the author does not reflect explicitly and critically on his own approach. In a book which is of interest not only for specialists in religious studies but also for Classicists and Egyptologists, the short remarks supplied in ch. 1 (p. 34) do not suffice. Moreover, the possibilities and limits which the adaptation of anthropological methods entails would have required a more thorough discussion: under which premises and in which respects are rural societies in (proto-)industrial India and Mexico cross-culturally comparable to Roman Egyptian 'villages' or *komai*? Thus, the critical reader is forced to test F.'s interpretations in each case to make sure that the author's results are rooted in the sources themselves rather than in a preconceived theoretical model.

As an experiment, F.'s book is stimulating. It is not, contrary to what the title might suggest to some readers, a handbook or an introduction to the topic under review.

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MAREILE HAASE

KURT HÜBNER, *Glaube und Denken. Dimensionen der Wirklichkeit*—Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001 (xvi, 625 p.) ISBN 3-16-147492-9 (cloth) EUR 39.00.

When one of the most influential German philosophers of the 20th century publishes a huge study on "Belief and Thinking. Dimensions of Reality," philosophers and religious scholars alike should take a serious look at that. In his long career, Kurt Hübner (born 1921) has written extensively on the foundations of science, its limitations and its relation to myth and religion. In his new book, he picks up a theme that was developed earlier—particularly in his seminal *Kritik der wissenschaftlichen Vernunft* (1978; ⁴1993; English

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Critique of Scientific Reason, 1983) and in *Die Wahrheit des Mythos* (1985)—and weaves it into an elaborated philosophy of religion. Hübner begins with critically evaluating the ability of empirical science to arrive at an accurate description of reality. Because the *a priori* assumptions of science are—against commonly held views—themselves *not* derived from empirical perception, he speaks of a specific ontology of science and maintains that every attempt to claim an ultimate ontological access to the structure of (entire) reality is bound to fail. From a metatheoretical point of view, we have to accept the contingency of any possible ontology, including natural science. Two ‘General Principles of Tolerance’ are derived from this: First, “Because all ontologies are contingent and are lacking a necessary validity, there is no reason to prefer one to another” (p. 5). Second, “non-ontological concepts of reality, which emanate from (numinous) experiences, can never be falsified, whether they are, from an outside view, terminologically transformable into an ontology, or not” (p. 7).

Harmless as they seem at first glance, these principles have far-reaching implications. To begin with, the ontologies of science, of ‘myth,’ and of ‘revelation’ address different realms of reality that exist side by side. Although there are points of interrelation, it is not possible to prove or disprove one of them with the tools of the other. Consequently, any attempt to ‘demythologize’ the Christian scriptures or to give scientific evidence to the existence of ‘God’ or ‘faith’ must inevitably fail. In long and well-informed chapters the author describes the history of Western thought, from Plato to the present, as a history of continuous failure, since both Christian theology and metaphysics did not take seriously the substantial differences between ontologies of revelation and science. Hübner ends with Nietzsche and Sartre, who represent the tattered human condition of modernity. But while here metaphysics turns into godlessness, a closer look at modernity uncovers that scientific reasoning is itself an integral part of salvation and is crucially linked to the order of revelation.

As always, one must praise Hübner for his clear analytical and terminological approach. This book is a valuable contribution to theory of religion at the interface of philosophy, theology, and science. Hübner’s interpretational framework is very useful for clarifying the long-standing debate on ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives in the study of religion, but his claim for the metaphysical foundation of science and his refutation of a ‘scientific’ approach to transcendence is likely to embarrass hardcore natural scientists and

(Christian) theologians, respectively. Although large portions of Part One—dealing with major Christian issues such as creation, grace, trinity, guilt, and revelation—read like a subjective and almost meditative exegesis, and some of the historical details of Part Two are at least arguable, *Glaube und Denken* stands out as an extraordinary analysis, recommended to anyone interested in the theoretical foundations of science and the study of religion.

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KOCKU VON STUCKRAD

RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION, 12

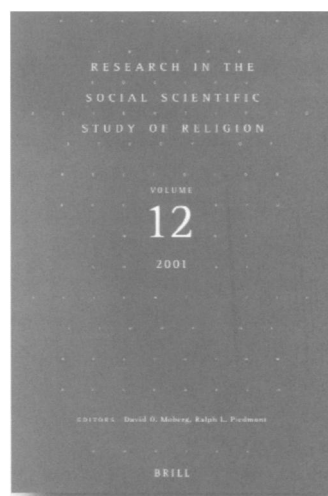
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David O. Moberg is Sociology Professor Emeritus at Marquette University, Milwaukee, USA. He has been the co-editor of RSSR since its start in 1986.

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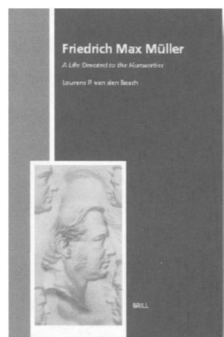
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L.P. van den Bosch, studied Theology and Science of Religion (University of Groningen) and Indology (University of Groningen/Utrecht) and wrote a thesis on Atharvavedaparisishtha (Utrecht, 1978). He is a Senior Lecturer for the History of Religions at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands. He has written various articles on Vedic subjects, on the practice of widow burning and on Friedrich Max Müller.

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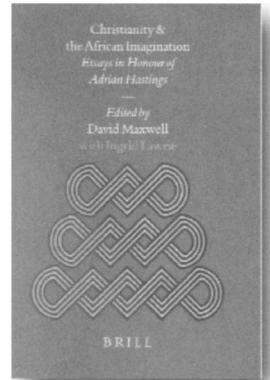
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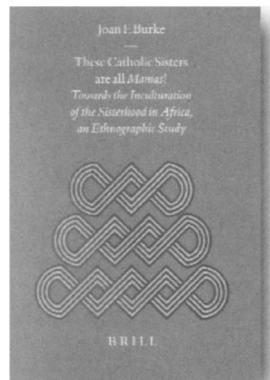
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WHAT, IF ANYTHING, IS MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM?*

PROBLEMS OF DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

JONATHAN A. SILK

Summary

This study investigates some problems regarding the definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Tracing the history of the notion in modern scholarship, it pays particular attention to the question of the relation between Mahāyāna and so-called Hīnayāna or Sectarian Buddhism. Finding the commonly used methods of classification which rely on necessary and sufficient conditions to be inadequate to the task, it suggests the alternative employment of polythetic classification, a method which permits a constantly variable set of questions and data to be taken into account in the most flexible and accommodating manner.

Any attempt to focus on a given object of study presupposes, in the very first place, the ability to recognize that relevant object, to distinguish it from the surrounding world, that is, to define the object. And any attempt to sort or order more than one object requires us to classify those multiple objects. Thus, our very attempts to perceive the world around us require us to define and to classify.

Usually, of course, we have no need to consciously reflect on the definitions and classifications we employ. But when we are unsure of the status of an object, when we think there may be some errors in the way objects are organized, when we encounter some apparent disagreement with those with whom we are attempting to communicate concerning an object, or when the very identity or even existence of an object is in question, then we must resort to explicit strategies of definition and classification in order to clarify the discussion.

* I wish to express my sincere thanks to my erstwhile student Ms. Bonnie Gulas, whose insights into taxonomy from the viewpoint of paleontology have been very helpful to me. Thanks also to Profs. Kenneth Bailey and Richard Ethridge for their encouragement.

The identity and the status of Mahāyāna Buddhism are points very much in question, and it is virtually self-evident that communication concerning Mahāyāna Buddhism occasions many disagreements. Therefore, the need for the definition and classification of Mahāyāna Buddhism is obvious. But how we should approach such definition and classification is somewhat less plain. For it is basically true that in order to define an object one must have some fundamental sense of what it is. I cannot know that my definition of apples must accommodate MacIntosh, Red Delicious and Fuji, but not navel oranges, unless I know beforehand that the former are apples and the latter is not. And yet, this process must be more than circular. I must be able to refine my understanding and my definition, to correct misclassifications or even alter entirely the basis of the classificatory scheme as my familiarity with my object of study grows. How this process may begin in the first place is a question primarily for cognitive scientists, and need not concern us here. We may accept as an irreducible given that an object of study exists, which has been labeled “Mahāyāna Buddhism,” and that certain senses of its definition and classification are and have been held by students of this object. We may therefore fruitfully begin by examining some of these ideas.¹

An apparently fundamental presupposition in at least most of the conceptualizations of Mahāyāna Buddhism so far is that it is one pole of a binary set, that is, it is seen in opposition to something else, some other form of Buddhism. The question then arises how the two are related. Depending on who is talking, the opposite pole may sometimes or even usually be called “Hīnayāna,” or by those with somewhat more historical awareness denoted by such names as Sectarian Buddhism, Nikāya Buddhism, Conservative Buddhism, Śrāvakayāna, and recently Mainstream Buddhism (or similar terms in other languages). Whatever the names used, the conceptualization is

¹ One of the terminological issues that might be addressed is whether we aim at typology or taxonomy; the former is conceptual and qualitative, the latter empirical and quantitative. I think we will see below that ultimately what we seek is a taxonomy. See Bailey 1994:6–7.

often basically as follows: First, there is an older portion of monastic Buddhism, usually felt to be conservative, closer to the source, which emphasizes a personal liberation from saṃsāra accessible only to the monk who can devote himself to intensive meditation practice, and so on. This is the Buddhism whose modern living representative is the Theravāda school, and when the term is used it is this which is called Hīnayāna, the small, or more literally inferior, vehicle.

The opposite of this, the Mahāyāna or great, superior vehicle, is opposite in every way. As portrayed by its partisans, Mahāyāna Buddhism can be presented as a sort of Reformation, in which the decayed parts of the old tradition are rejected in favor of new, positive innovations, although these innovations are of course wholly in concert with the original and authentic core intentions of Śākyamuni's Buddhism. The selfishness of the old monastic, world-denying search for escape from rebirth is replaced by the bodhisattva ideal. The bodhisattva is the polar opposite of the Hīnayāna monk, and this Mahāyāna Buddhist hero, active in the world, must work tirelessly for the liberation from suffering of all beings, because he knows that there is no difference between all beings and himself. Thus portrayed Mahāyāna Buddhism is at once both a timeless, universal truth, a path to liberation for all, monk and layperson (man or woman) alike, and a replacement for the older, limited, indeed inferior, Hīnayāna path.

It almost goes without saying that there are too many objections to this picture, this caricature, really, of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna to list them all. Among the problems we might number the question of whether this account claims to be history. History happens in time, of course, and Mahāyāna Buddhism so presented seems to be timeless. How can the timeless occur in history? Another objection might be simply that the picture of Hīnayāna presented here is not accurate, a view taken by many modern partisans of Theravāda Buddhism, for example, who nevertheless may accept the basic binary scenario. That such views are prevalent is easily demonstrated.

The late Professor André Bareau, in his article on "Hīnayāna Buddhism" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, promoted as a new standard reference, wrote:

The term *Hīnayāna* refers to the group of Buddhist schools or sects that appeared before the beginning of the common era and those directly derived from them. The word *Hīnayāna* . . . is pejorative. It was applied disdainfully to these early forms of Buddhism by the followers of the great reformist movement that arose just at the beginning of the common era, which referred to itself as the *Mahāyāna*. . . . It would be more correct to give the name “early Buddhism” to what is called *Hīnayāna*, for the term denotes the whole collection of the most ancient forms of Buddhism: those earlier than the rise of the *Mahāyāna* and those that share the same inspiration as these and have the same ideal, namely the *arhat*.²

Yet other formulations are more abstract, less quasi-historical. A look at several standard sources, some rather recent, is instructive. The *Bukkyō Daijii* says:

Daijō. *Mahāyāna*. In contrast to *Shōjō* [**Hīnayāna*]. The Dharma-gate ridden by people of great disposition. *Dai* means vast, *jō* means carrying. So, this is the Dharma-gate of compassion and wisdom, self-benefit and benefit for others, which carries the people who have the bodhisattva’s great disposition, depositing them on the other-shore of Bodhi-nirvāṇa. . . . The *Mahāyāna* Doctrine is designated as what is preached in order to convert [beings] through this Dharma-gate. In opposition to this is the *Hīnayāna*, the Dharma-gate of selfish liberation which carries the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas to the goal of the nirvāṇa of destruction. This is designated the *Hīnayāna* Doctrine. . . .³

Nakamura’s *Bukkyōgo Daijiten* says:⁴ “Great Vehicle. One of the two great schools (*ryūha*) of Buddhist teachings. Arose in the 1st–2nd centuries. In contrast to the preceding Buddhism, so-called *Hīnayāna*. It is especially characterized by practice which saves others rather than working for its own benefit, and thus emphasizes becoming a Buddha. . . .” Oda’s *Bukkyō Daijiten* says:⁵ “*Dai* is distinguished from *Shō* [small]. *Jō* means vehicle, and refers to Doctrine, that is the Great Teaching. *Hīnayāna* is the teaching which causes [beings] to seek for the quiescent nirvāṇa of the wisdom of destruction of the body, within which are distinguished the Śrāvaka and Pratyekabuddha, while the

² Bareau 1987:195.

³ Ryūkoku Daigaku 1914–1922:5.3169c, s.v.

⁴ Nakamura 1981:920cd.

⁵ Oda 1917:1144b.

Mahāyāna is the teaching which opens up omniscience, within which are distinguished the One Vehicle and the Three Vehicles.” In his short description at the beginning of his long article “Daijō” in the *Hōbōgirin*, Hubert Durt states that Mahāyāna is a “Metaphorical term describing the soteriological movement, divided into many tendencies, which developed within Buddhism with the aim of promoting the conduct of the Bodhisattva as the ideal of practice for the followers of the movement.”⁶ Mochizuki’s *Bukkyō Daijiten* says:⁷ “Great Vehicle. In contrast to Hīnayāna. That is, the Dharma-gate which practices the six perfections, saves all beings, and converts bodhisattvas who aspire to become buddhas.” It is clear from this sample that, at least in our standard sources, the explicit formulations of the definition and classification of Mahāyāna Buddhism almost universally contrast it with “Hīnayāna.”

But even if we do not use the term Hīnayāna, which without question is in origin intentionally caluminous, is it right to see the structure of Buddhism as essentially dichotomous (or if we take another approach which includes the so-called Vajrayāna, tripartite)? Or from another point of view, is the best way to think about—that is, to try to conceptualize, define and classify—Mahāyāna Buddhism really to divide things into Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna at all?

This seems to be the way things have always been done, with Mahāyāna contrasted either doctrinally or institutionally with Hīnayāna or Sectarian Buddhism. And it might even be possible to trace one source of this formulation in modern scholarship. Most scholars who have expressed themselves concerning the institutional relations between Mahāyāna and Sectarian Buddhism seem to have been motivated by their interpretations of remarks made in the medieval period by Chinese pilgrims, travellers from Buddhist China to Buddhist India who kept records which report in detail the Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna populations of various monasteries in India and Indian Central Asia. It

⁶ *Hōbōgirin*, p. 767 (published 1994).

⁷ Mochizuki 1932–36:4.3248b.

is partly on the basis of these accounts that Étienne Lamotte, for example, wrote his highly influential study on the origins of the Mahāyāna.⁸ Since the general and overall honesty and accuracy of the information in these pilgrim's records can be verified from archaeological and other evidence, there seemed *prima facie* to be little reason to question their accounts. But the interpretation of these documents is not always straightforward, and it is perhaps ironic that Auguste Barth, basing his ideas of the relationship between the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna on exactly the same accounts, reached conclusions diametrically opposed to those of Lamotte.

Among the writings of the Chinese traveller-monks Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing,⁹ that of Yijing, the *Record of Buddhist Practices*, dating from 691, is the only one which makes a point of carefully defining its terminology. This makes it, for us, probably the most important of the available accounts. Yijing's crucial definition runs as follows:¹⁰ "Those who worship the Bodhisattvas and read the Mahāyāna Sūtras are called the Mahāyānists, while those who do not perform these are called the Hīnayānists." In a phrase immediately preceding that just quoted, it seems to be stated that schools or sects may belong to either vehicle, and on this basis Junjirō Takakusu already observed over one hundred years ago, in the introduction to his translation of Yijing's work, that "I-Tsing's statement seems to imply that one and the same school adheres to the Hīnayāna in one place and to the Mahāyāna in another; a school does not exclusively belong to the one or the other."¹¹ Only two years later, Auguste Barth offered his detailed comments on Yijing in the form of a review of the work of Takakusu and Chavannes.¹² Discussing Yijing's statement about the definition

⁸ Lamotte 1954.

⁹ Faxian (mid-late 4th century), Xuanzang (602–664) and Yijing (635–713).

¹⁰ Takakusu 1896:14–15. The text is the *Nanhai jigui neifa-zhuan* T. 2125 (LIV) 205c11–13.

¹¹ Takakusu 1896:xxii–xxiii.

¹² Barth 1898, while actually a detailed study in its own right, is written as a review of Takakusu 1896 and Chavannes 1894.

of the Mahāyāna, Barth concluded that “there were Mahāyānists and Hīnayānists in all or in almost all the schools.”¹³ He went on to draw out some of the implications of this observation:¹⁴

The Mahāyāna thus appears to us as a religious movement with rather vague limits, at the same time an internal modification of primitive Buddhism and a series of additions to this same Buddhism, alongside of which the old foundations were able to subsist more or less intact. . . . It is thus very probable that there are many degrees and varieties in the Mahāyāna, and that it is perhaps something of an illusion to hope that, when we define that of Asaṅga or Vasubandhu, for example, we will thereby obtain a formula applicable to all the others. All things considered, we can suppose that things here are as they so often are in this so unsteady and murky Buddhism, and that the best way of explaining the Mahāyāna is to not try too hard to define it.

At the same time, however, Barth remained extremely cautious. He suggested, even argued, that it was in Yijing’s own interests to persuade his audience that there was little or no fundamental difference between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, since Yijing was trying to propagandize among his Chinese compatriots, almost all exclusive Mahāyānists, the Vinaya of the Sarvāstivāda.¹⁵ This is an insightful observation, and illustrates Barth’s acute sensitivity to the multiple factors which could have been at work in the background of the statements of any of our witnesses.

Barth’s approach and his observations seem to have remained unnoticed by most scholars until Jean Przyluski, an extremely creative and iconoclastic scholar, again remarked on the relation between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. Having discussed various Mahāyāna scrip-

¹³ Barth 1898:448.

¹⁴ Barth 1898:449–450.

¹⁵ Barth 1898:450. It is actually the Vinaya of the Mūla-Sarvāstivāda that Yijing translated into Chinese. Although the relation between these two sects is not yet entirely clear, it would be well to avoid conflating the two whenever possible. I confess that I remain unconvinced by the arguments of Enomoto 2000 that the two, Sarvāstivāda and Mūla-Sarvāstivāda, are the same.

tures in his seminal study on the early Buddhist Councils, Przyluski concluded:¹⁶

As rapid and as incomplete as it is, this discussion of the Mahāyānist canons allows us at least to recognize the insufficiency of the theories which have prevailed until now in European learning. The Mahāyāna has long been represented as a unique school which developed from the first in the regions of North-west India, from whence it spread to Central and East Asia. It is a subdivision of “Northern Buddhism.” But this so-called “Northern Buddhism” is only a geographical expression. It already appeared to open minds, like a shower of diverse sects oriented toward the North, East or West, and more precisely, each sect resolves itself in its turn into two distinct parts, one Mahāyānist, the other Hīnayānist. Without doubt one cannot negate the existence of aspirations, of great dogmas common to all the Mahāyāna factions. But these convergent tendencies do not cause us to fail to recognize the remoteness of the original groups. Our analysis of the canons has shown us that there had not been a sole Mahāyāna issued from the Sarvāstivāda school. One can also speak, up to a certain point, of a Dharmaguptaka Mahāyāna, a Mahāsāṃghika Mahāyāna, and so on. The establishment of this fact, in addition to its obvious historical interest, has the advantage of allowing us, on many points, a new and more precise interpretation of documents and of facts.

Noting the opinion of Louis Finot that there is some contradiction between Yijing’s description of Buddhism in Champa and the epigraphical evidence, Przyluski responded as follows:¹⁷

The contradiction between the testimony of Yijing and epigraphy is only apparent. It seems inexplicable that for such a long time the Mahāyāna has been taken as a 19th sect, separate from the Hīnayānistic 18 sects. But all difficulty disappears at the moment when one admits the existence of a Sarvāstivādin Mahāyāna and a Sammitīya Mahāyāna—that is to say, of groups the canon of which was formed out of one or many baskets consistent with the doctrine of the Great Vehicle and the many Śrāvakaṭīṭakas belonging to the Mūlasarvāstivāda or Sammitīya proper.

Soon after the publication of Przyluski’s remarks they and the earlier observations of Barth were noticed by Louis de La Vallée Poussin. La Vallée Poussin observed that the question of “sect” is a matter of Vinaya, of monastic discipline, and that the designation “school”

¹⁶ Przyluski 1926–28:361–362.

¹⁷ Przyluski 1926–28:363.

is a matter of Abhidharma or doctrine. “There were in all the sects, in all the groups subject to a certain archaic Vinaya, adherents of the two schools, Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, schools which are further subdivided into Sautrāntikas and so on.”¹⁸

La Vallée Poussin has clarified a very important distinction here, although later scholars have not always followed his lead. Since some confusion seems to have been caused heretofore by a certain inconsistency in vocabulary, it is perhaps best to clarify our terms. By the term “sect” I follow La Vallée Poussin and intend a translation or equivalent of the term *nikāya*. A *nikāya* is defined strictly speaking not by any doctrine but by adherence to a common set of monastic rules, a Vinaya. One enters a *nikāya* or sect through a formal ecclesiastical act of ordination, an *upasampadā karmavācanā*. My use of the term “sect” here differs, therefore, from at least one established modern usage. A common presumption of Western uses of the term “sect” posits a Weberian dichotomy, even an antagonism, between Church and sect.¹⁹ This is not the case for the sects of Indian Buddhism, as I use the term. All independent institutional groups in Indian Buddhism, as defined by their (at least pro forma) allegiance to their own governing Vinaya literature, are sects. The Buddhist Church in India is constituted by the sects.²⁰ There is no implication here of

¹⁸ La Vallée Poussin 1929:234. In what is perhaps an isolated case in Japan, the same position was espoused by Tomomatsu Entai 1932:332. There can be little doubt that Tomomatsu, who studied in France, was deeply influenced by Przyluski’s thought.

¹⁹ van der Leeuw 1938:I.261 goes even farther: “[T]he sect . . . severs itself not only from the given community but from the “world” in general. . . . [T]he sect is not founded on a religious covenant that is severed from another religious community such as the church; it segregates itself, rather, from community in general. . . . The correlate of the sect is therefore not the church but the community; it is the most extreme outcome of the covenant.”

²⁰ The only meaningful candidate for a “Buddhist Church” in India is the so-called Universal Community, the saṃgha of the four directions. However, it appears that this was a purely abstract and imaginary entity, with no institutional existence. (But it is not known, for example, how gifts to this universal community, often recorded in inscriptions, were administered.) It may, in this sense, be something like the

schism, of an old and established institution set off against a new and innovative one.²¹

The term “school,” on the other hand, refers to the notion designated in Sanskrit by the word *vāda*. Schools are defined primarily by doctrinal characteristics, and are associations of those who hold to common teachings and follow the same intellectual methods, but they have no institutional existence. A Buddhist monk must belong to a sect, that is to say, he must have one, unique institutional identification determined by the liturgy according to which he was ordained.²² There is no evidence that there was any kind of Buddhist monk other than one associated with a Sectarian ordination lineage until some Chinese Buddhists began dispensing with full ordination and taking only “bodhisattva precepts.”²³ To break the ordination lineage in these terms would be to sever oneself from the ephemeral continuity which

“Brotherhood of Man.” This Brotherhood, though it may exist, has no officers, no treasurer, no meeting hall, no newsletter.

²¹ It is this latter type of definition, however, which was assumed by T.W. Rhys Davids 1908:307a when he wrote about “Sects (Buddhist)” for the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Rhys Davids assumed the meaning of “sect in the European sense—i.e. of a body of believers in one or more doctrines not held by the majority, a body with its own endowments, its own churches or chapels, and its own clergy ordained by itself.” He went on to say 308b: “There were no ‘sects’ in India, in any proper use of that term. There were different tendencies of opinion, named after some teacher . . . , or after some locality . . . , or after the kind of view dominant. . . . All the followers of such views designated by the terms or names occurring in any of the lists were members of the same order and had no separate organization of any kind.” I think this view is also questionable, but in any case the point is that Rhys Davids is applying here a very different definition of the term “sect” than I am.

²² This point, and the terminological distinction, has been noticed and reiterated by Heinz Bechert a number of times recently. Bechert however refers in his notes only to La Vallée Poussin’s discussion.

²³ La Vallée Poussin 1930:20 wrote: “I believe that in the India of Asaṅga as in that of Śāntideva one could not have been a Buddhist monk without being associated with one of the ancient sects, without accepting one of the archaic Vinayas.” On the other hand, I mean exactly what I say by the expression “there is no evidence. . . .” This does not mean that there absolutely were no monks other than those associated with Sectarian ordination lineages. It means we have no evidence on this point.

guarantees the authenticity of one's ordination by tracing it back to a teacher ordained directly by the Buddha in an unbroken line of teachers, each of whom had in turn received ordination from such a properly ordained teacher. Thus the mythology is such that if one's ordination cannot be traced back in a line which begins at Śākyamuni, it is not valid. It is again La Vallée Poussin who offers a crucial observation:²⁴

All the Mahāyānists who are *pravrajita* [renunciants] renounced the world entering into one of the ancient sects.—A monk, submitting to the disciplinary code (Vinaya) of the sect into which he was received, is 'touched by grace' and undertakes the resolution to become a buddha. Will he reject his Vinaya?—'If he thinks or says "A future buddha has nothing to do with learning or observing the law of the Vehicle of Śrāvakas," he commits a sin of pollution (*kliṣṭā āpatti*).'

In the same study, La Vallée Poussin concluded thus:²⁵

From the disciplinary point of view, the Mahāyāna is not autonomous. The adherents of the Mahāyāna are monks of the Mahāsāṃghika, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvāstivādin and other traditions, who undertake the vows and rules of the bodhisattvas without abandoning the monastic vows and rules fixed by the tradition with which they are associated on the day of their Upasampad [full ordination]. In the same way, at all times every bhikṣu was authorized to undertake the vows of the dhūtaguṇas. . . .

The Mahāyāna, in principle and in its origins, is only a 'particular devotional practice,' precisely a certain sort of mystical life of which the center is the doctrine of pure love for all creatures: this mystical life, like the mystical life of ancient Buddhism which was oriented toward Nirvāṇa and personal salvation, has for its necessary support the keeping of the moral laws, the monastic code. The Mahāyāna is thus perfectly orthodox and would have been able to recruit adepts among those monks most attached to the old disciplinary rule.

²⁴ La Vallée Poussin 1930:25. The reference at the end of this quotation is a translation, although without any mention of the source, from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Wogihara 1936:173.5–10). La Vallée Poussin had in fact quoted this passage years earlier, 1909:339–40, there giving the Sanskrit in note 1. At that time he also noted the difficulty of translating *kliṣṭā āpatti*, suggesting "un péché mortel."

²⁵ La Vallée Poussin 1930:32–33. In his preface to Dutt 1930:vii–viii, La Vallée Poussin expressed exactly the same sentiments.

After the time of La Vallée Poussin, few indeed are the scholars who seem to have noticed these observations or pursued the study of the Mahāyāna with an eye on this hypothesis. One scholar who has, however, paid attention to the hypotheses of La Vallée Poussin is Heinz Bechert.²⁶ I think, however, that Bechert has gone beyond where his evidence leads him. He writes, for example:²⁷

We learn from the accounts of Chinese pilgrims, and from the Indian Buddhist sources themselves, that there had been Mahāyānic groups in various nikāyas. Thus, a late text like the *Kriyāsaṅgrahapañjikā* still emphasizes that the adherents of Mahāyāna must undergo the ordination or upasampadā as prescribed by their nikāya before being introduced as Mahāyāna monks by another formal act. Thus, the outside forms of the old nikāyas were preserved, though they did not retain their original importance.

The claim that the old nikāyas did not retain their original importance is not defended, and as far as I know there is little evidence that would suggest this is true. What is more, without specifying what we think “their original importance” was, how would we begin to investigate whether this may or may not have been retained? In another formulation, Bechert has suggested the following:²⁸

For those who accepted Mahāyāna, their allegiance to their nikāya was of quite a different nature from that of a Hīnayānist: it was the observance of a vinaya tradition which made them members of the Sangha, but it no longer necessarily included the acceptance of the specific doctrinal viewpoints of the particular nikāya. In the context of Mahāyāna, the traditional doctrinal controversies of the nikāyas had lost much of their importance and, thus, as a rule, one would not give up allegiance to one’s nikāya on account of becoming a follower of Mahāyānistic doctrines originating with monks ordained in the tradition of another nikāya.

²⁶ Bechert has repeatedly published more or less the same remarks, sometimes in the same words. See for example: 1964:530–31; 1973:12–13; 1976:36–37; 1977:363–64; 1982:64–65, and 1992:96–97. Hisashi Matsumura 1990:82–85, note 53, has also offered some bibliographic notes which indicate his awareness of the opinions of Barth and his successors.

²⁷ Bechert 1973:12. The reference to the *Kriyāsaṅgrahapañjikā* is evidently to Dutt 1931:263.

²⁸ Bechert 1992:96–97, virtually identical with 1977:363–64.

Whether or not this is partially or even totally true, I know of no evidence which might decide the matter either way, and neither does Bechert provide any. It is worth keeping firmly in mind that we almost always wish to say more than the available evidence actually allows. These are urges which, if not resisted, will almost surely lead our studies astray.²⁹

One thing that the approaches mentioned above have in common is their implicit assumption that the concept of Mahāyāna movements is meaningful, but only in the context of some contrast with what is not Mahāyāna. This is generally understood to refer to pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, although it need not, and I think in very many cases in fact certainly does not. This non-Mahāyāna Buddhism is often designated in modern writing “Hīnayāna.” I think it is quite certain, however, that the referent of the term “Hīnayāna,” when it occurs in Buddhist texts themselves, is never any existent institution or organization, but a rhetorical fiction. We can say rather freely, but I think quite accurately, that “Hīnayāna” designates “whomever we, the speakers, do not at the present moment agree with doctrinally or otherwise here in our discussion.”³⁰ Although the example is not from the earliest period, the scholar Asaṅga’s comment in his *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* “That which is inferior (namely, the Hīnayāna) is truly inferior,”³¹ can hardly be construed as referring to an actual, specific, and institutionally identifiable group of Hīnayāna Buddhists. In addition, the rhetorical context in which we find such references suggests that such “enemies” were imagined to be contemporary, which in turn is a strong indication that whatever “Hīnayāna” might refer to, it is not pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism as such. A fundamental error is thus made

²⁹ As an example see Cohen 1995:16, who says, without a shred of evidence: “Mahāyānists might come from all *nikāyas*; yet there is an expectation that prior *nikāya* affiliations are moot once a *yānic* conversion is made.”

³⁰ It is in this sense formally similar to the designation *tīrthika* or *tīrthya*, the former defined by Monier-Williams 1899 s.v. quite well as “an adherent or head of any other than one’s own creed.” The terms are, of course, derogatory. (It is perhaps also worth noting that, as far as I know, Buddhist texts do not refer to other Buddhists as *tīrthika*.)

³¹ Lévi 1907:I.10d: *yat hīnaṃ hīnaṃ eva tat*.

when we imagine references to “Hīnayāna” in Mahāyāna literature to apply to so-called Sectarian Buddhism, much less to Early Buddhism.³²

It may be largely due to the numerous vitriolic references in Mahāyāna literature to the “inferior vehicle” that some scholars, such as Stephen Kent, have found it hard to believe that there could be any sort of continuity between Sectarian Buddhism and the Mahāyāna.³³ This misunderstanding is based on a series of erroneous identifications, which we can encapsulate as the equation: Hīnayāna = Śrāvakayāna = actual identifiable nikāyas. Sasaki Shizuka points to the equally erroneous equation: *śrāvakayāna* = *śrāvaka* = *bhikṣu*.³⁴ While it is

³² An example of a scholar led into just such an error is Cohen 1995:20, who says: “Of all the categories through which to reconstruct Indian Buddhism’s history, Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are the most productive. Nevertheless, our reconstructions have a secret life of their own. Each *yāna* can be defined positively, through a necessary and sufficient characteristic for individuals’ membership within that taxon. Moreover, because these two *yānas* are logical opposites, each can also be defined negatively, through its lack of the other’s necessary and sufficient characteristic. However, in both cases, these positive and negative definitions are not conceptually equivalent. That is, the Mahāyāna is positively characterized by its members’ pursuit of the bodhisattva path; the Hīnayāna is negatively characterized as the non-Mahāyāna, i.e., its members do not necessarily pursue Buddhahood as their ideal. However, when positively characterized the Hīnayāna is defined by members’ affiliation with one or another *nikāya*, which, of course, means that the Mahāyāna is known negatively by its members’ institutional separation from those same *nikāyas*.”

³³ See Kent 1982. Kent, a specialist in sectarian movements but not terribly knowledgeable about Buddhism, suggested that the rhetoric of Mahāyāna sūtras resembles the rhetoric common to embattled sectarian groups in various religions. He portrayed the contrast between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna monks as one of great hostility, and emphasized the role of the laity as a force in forming the Mahāyāna communities and their outlook. Notice here that Kent’s use of the term “sect” follows the standard dichotomous Weberian definition, and essentially differs from the way I use the term.

³⁴ I will discuss below the views of Lamotte, who considers the Mahāyāna to be anti-clerical. Hirakawa also believes that Mahāyāna texts are anti-clerical. His reasoning, as Sasaki has pointed out, is based on the idea that the so-called *Śrāvakayāna* is heavily criticized in that literature. But attacks on the *Śrāvakayāna* are not attacks

probably true that all *śrāvakas* are *bhikṣus*,³⁵ the reverse certainly does not follow. The polemical attacks on *śrāvakas* that we find in some, although certainly far from all, Mahāyāna scriptures should be understood as a criticism not of all monks but of those who do not accept the Mahāyāna doctrines. Since the term Hīnayāna is not an institutional label but an ideological one, we might even loosely translate it as “small-minded.” The term embodies a criticism of certain types of thinking and of certain views, but does not refer to institutional affiliations. I therefore strongly doubt, pace Kent, that the Mahāyāna literature which criticizes the Hīnayāna is a product of sectarians who isolated themselves, or were isolated, physically or institutionally. Rather, I would suggest that it is a product of groups which doctrinally opposed other groups, quite possibly within one and the same community or group of communities.

If Mahāyāna Buddhism is not institutionally separate from the sects of Sectarian Buddhism, and if it might exist in some form more tangible than a set of abstract doctrinal ideas, how then can we define it, how can we locate it? Let us posit that Mahāyāna Buddhists were the authors of Mahāyāna scriptures, and a Mahāyāna community was a community of such authors. One immediate and fundamental result of this formulation is that we must stop referring, at the very least provisionally, to “the Mahāyāna” in the singular. Until and unless we can establish affinities between texts, and therefore begin to identify broader communities, we must—provisionally—suppose each scripture to represent a different community, a different Mahāyāna.³⁶ We should note here that if each Mahāyāna scripture

on monasticism in general (that is, *śrāvaka bhikṣu*), but attacks on those who hold doctrinal positions which are worthy of criticism, that is anti-Mahāyāna positions. There is nothing “anti-clerical” about it. Nevertheless, as Sasaki has emphasized, this misunderstanding pervades Hirakawa’s work on the subject. See Sasaki 1997.

³⁵ At least in Mahāyāna literature, as far as I know. On this point, however, see the interesting study of Peter Masefield 1986.

³⁶ Quite obviously, in the case of some texts, as Shimoda 1991 has argued for the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* for instance, a given literary work may be the product of more than one community, as it grew over time. I do not necessarily

represents a different Mahāyāna community, we have gone farther in the direction of diversity than Barth, Przyluski, La Vallée Poussin, and others who suggested that we think in terms of Sectarian Mahāyānas, a Sarvāstivāda Mahāyāna, a Dharmaguptaka Mahāyāna and so forth. In fact, theoretically speaking we might even go farther still and say, with modern theorists, that each *reading* of a work which produces a new interpretation allows, although it does not necessitate, the creation of a new community. Radical re-readings, which amount to re-writings, may indeed create new communities, but access to this level of the tradition(s) is certainly impossible to obtain and so, from a practical point of view, we are surely justified in accepting the generalities of a given text as an integral unit, at least as a starting point.

If each Mahāyāna scripture denotes a Mahāyāna community, we must next ask ourselves: What, then, is a Mahāyāna scripture? As, again, only a starting point, a very practical and reasonable answer is to posit that those scriptures identified by tradition, for instance in the Tibetan and Chinese canonical collections, as Mahāyāna sūtras should be so considered.³⁷ In fact, efforts to second-guess such traditional attributions are virtually always based on preconceptions modern scholars hold concerning the nature of the Mahāyāna, and almost never on a considered and methodologically sophisticated approach to the sources.

agree completely with the details of Shimoda's analysis of the case of the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, but the general point is beyond dispute.

³⁷ This should not be taken to mean that, with a certain hindsight, we may not find traditional attributions to be occasionally wrong. We do find, for example, that Chinese scripture catalogues sometimes designate alternate translations of Mahāyāna scriptures as non-Mahāyāna. We may note for example the cases of T. 1469, in fact a section of the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, or T. 170, in fact a translation of the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā*. Neither text is recognized by traditional Chinese classifications as a Mahāyāna scripture. I am of course aware of the fact that the classification of scriptures in China and Tibet (and doubtless in India too) was a polemical activity, motivated by a multitude of forces. These sources are not "objective," of course, a trait they share with every other type of source.

I have mentioned that I think it more helpful, if not more accurate, to refer to multiple Mahāyāna groups, to communities of the early Mahāyāna, rather than to employ the definite article “the” before the word Mahāyāna. Since I have defined these communities by the texts they produced, which are of course multiple, it is natural that we should speak of these Mahāyānas in the plural. It is a possible but not certain hypothesis that there were actual people, perhaps monks, arranged in multiple groups sharing Mahāyānist ideologies. It is again possible, but not certain, that various monastic communities distributed geographically over India on the one hand, and associated with different sects of Sectarian Buddhism on the other, produced different varieties of early Mahāyāna Buddhism. If this is so, almost certainly, then, later on there was a kind of leveling, perhaps by the time of Nāgārjuna, leading to a more generalized “Mahāyāna,” in which originally distinct sources were treated and utilized equally.³⁸ The suggestion of this type of diversity in the early stages of the movement is in harmony with the fact that, while apparently having some characteristics in common, various early Mahāyāna sūtras express somewhat, and sometimes radically, different points of view, and often seem to have been written in response to diverse stimuli. For example, the tenor of such (apparently) early sūtras as the *Kāśyapaparivarta* and the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā* on the one hand seems to have little in common with the logic and rhetoric behind the likewise putatively early *Pratyutpannasam mukhāvasthita*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* or *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* on the other.

When we read this sūtra literature, we should make an attempt to pay particular attention to its lateral internal stratification. By this I intend an analogy to archaeology, and would suggest that we should be able to distinguish not only vertical, which is to say chronological, layers, one text being later than another, but different horizontal strata of texts which may be more or less contemporaneous. Texts dating

³⁸ I think as a clear case of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, dating from a rather later period to be sure, in which diverse sūtras are quoted together without apparent regard for their initial source or provenance. I think that the approach of this text to its materials reflects a sort of “leveling.”

to the same period may still belong to different lineages, and may be the products of distinct communities. Many scholars seem, perhaps without properly having considered the matter, to have tried to fit all Mahāyāna literature (or more honestly, the small portion of it with which they are familiar) into one chronological progression, with little regard for the possibility that we may be dealing not with one tradition but with many. A conflation of the multiple traditions of Mahāyāna literature into “the” Mahāyāna, that is into a unitary and monolithic entity, inevitably produces considerable confusion and apparent contradiction.³⁹

The very nature of this approach, letting the many texts define the communities which are grouped together under the general rubric of Mahāyāna, means on the one hand that the community of concerns which we may extract from a single text cannot represent more than one aspect of the many faceted Mahāyāna. On the other hand, it suggests that a simultaneous study of multiple texts might detect generalized patterns, but is unlikely to uncover the worldview of a particular community of authors. It seems reasonable then that we might speak about the Mahāyāna ideology imagined by one text or group of texts without prejudicing the Mahāyāna ideology we may be able to extract from other sources. Where there is overlap between this ideology and that found in other (early) Mahāyāna scriptures, we may dare to speak of these overlapping features as characteristic of some generalized Mahāyāna doctrine. There will be other features which, while allowing us to group our texts together into, and as representing, a community of concerns, at the same time set this community apart from others.

In addition to the problem of the multiplicity of texts, we must also confront the problem of the inherently fluid state of any single text itself. If we insist upon the vertical and horizontal stratification of the sūtra literature, are we justified in treating admittedly diverse sources

³⁹ The comparable situation in studies of the “tree of life” is critiqued in Gordon 1999.

such as late Sanskrit manuscripts, multiple Chinese and Tibetan translations, and other types of evidence, as a single unit? Must we not rather treat each and every element in isolation? One practical solution to the potential infinite regress we confront here is to treat as representative of an imagined authorial community those materials which have a community of character or of value. To treat as a unit materials which we may identify with each other conceptually means that we may well be dealing occasionally with chronologically and geographically heterogeneous materials, and we must keep this fact in mind.⁴⁰

Given that the sources through which we might locate Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism and its communities are by definition its texts, it is natural that in investigating the origins and early history of the Mahāyāna movement we should wish to avail ourselves of the earliest accessible evidence. Unfortunately, we have absolutely no reliable way of determining in just what that might consist. For despite a rather facile application of the designation “early Mahāyāna,” this usage is rather disingenuous. The reason lies in the fact that we have very little idea about either what sources belong to the earliest period of the Mahāyāna movement, or even how we might find that out. There may in fact be good circumstantial grounds for assuming, as Paul Harrison has suggested,⁴¹ that none of the extant examples of Mahāyāna literature date, in the form in which we have them, to the period of the movement’s rise, and so even the very earliest recoverable materials must in some sense be called “medieval” (in the chronological sense).⁴² Almost the only hint we get to the relative

⁴⁰ I am quite aware that there is a certain circularity to this suggestion, but, as I said above, I would prefer to see the logic as spiral rather than as a closed circle, progress being possible.

⁴¹ Harrison 1993:139–140.

⁴² I do not know if this is what Mochizuki 1988:157 means when he says that “The *Mahāratnakūṭa*, viewed from the point of view of its establishment, may be called a Medieval Mahāyāna scripture.” He may be referring to the compilation of the collection by Bodhiruci in the eighth century, but at the end of the same paragraph, Mochizuki asserts that these *Mahāratnakūṭa* texts are certainly older than the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.

chronology of comparatively old Mahāyāna materials comes from their Chinese translations, dating back to roughly the second and third centuries C.E. What makes us suspect that the literature is older still is the impression we get from this material (which is, admittedly, not always easy to understand) that it already represents a considerable degree of sophistication and development, rather than recording the first few rough steps toward an expression of a new and raw set of ideas. If this impression is right, we will probably never have access to the oldest stratum of the Mahāyāna tradition's literary expressions. This is a crucial point, since in fact the tradition's literary remains are virtually all we have. Whatever archeological or other evidence we might wish to employ can be contextualized and given meaning only through an examination of the tradition's literature.

Because the content of Mahāyāna texts shows a very high degree of familiarity—we might say a total familiarity—with virtually all aspects of Sectarian Buddhist thought and literature, it is very difficult to believe that the authors of these texts, the *de facto* representatives of the Mahāyāna communities, were other than educated monks. It is difficult to imagine that the Mahāyāna sūtras could have been written by anyone other than such monks or, more likely, communities of such monks. If we follow the classical reasoning as expressed in the normative Vinaya literature, the only way to become a monk would have been through an orthodox ordination lineage, one which traces its imprimatur directly back to Śākyamuni Buddha. At a very early period, perhaps by the time of the so-called Second Council (although we cannot be sure about this), there would have been no way to become a monk except through orthodox ordination into one of the sectarian Vinaya traditions. Unless there existed a tradition of which we are totally ignorant—and this is far from impossible—the only way for one to become a monk (or nun) in the Indian Buddhist context was through orthodox ordination. If we follow the assumptions just articulated, the immediate implication is that all authors of Mahāyāna sūtras, that is to say all those who made up the communities we have defined as representative of the early Mahāyāna, were at one time members of

orthodox ordination lineages, members of sects as I have defined them above.

Could the monk-authors of these texts, our prototypical early Mahāyānists, have split from those ordination lineages and the sects they defined? What would it mean to leave such a sect and start another sect, given that the normatively defined ordination lineage could not—in its own terms—be broken? Without a Vinaya of their own, the break-away monks would have been unable to carry out further ordinations of new monks in their own lineage. If correct, this suggests that most probably it would not have been possible, in an Indian Buddhist context, for one to become a Buddhist monk at all without ordination in an orthodox ordination lineage. Again, if this is true, Mahāyāna communities could not have become institutionally independent of Sectarian communities, for they would have had no way of effecting the continuity of the movement other than by conversion of already ordained monks. Such an approach to the maintenance of a religious community, while not uninstanced in world religions, is relatively rare, and difficult to maintain. Moreover, if these Mahāyānists were either doctrinal rebels or reactionaries—which is also far from sure—how could they have coexisted with their sectarian brethren? Would it have been necessary to establish a new sect in order to freely profess their new doctrines and beliefs? It would not, if dissent in matters of doctrine was permissible.

The way in which sectarian affiliations are decided is not necessarily connected with questions of doctrine. An institutional split in a Buddhist community is technically termed *saṃghabheda*. It has been suggested at least since the time of the Meiji period Japanese scholar Maeda Eun that early and fundamental Mahāyāna doctrines have much in common with the teachings of the Mahāsāṃghika sect.⁴³ It is therefore of great interest to notice the Mahāsāṃghika definition of *saṃghabheda* as offered in the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya. *Saṃghabheda* is constituted by a failure of all the monks resident in the same sacred

⁴³ Maeda 1903.

enclosure (*sīmā*) to communally hold the *uposatha* rite.⁴⁴ Differences over doctrine are *not* grounds for *saṃghabheda* in the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya. In fact, what appears to be a contrast with the views of other sects, some of which allow doctrinal disputes to split the community (*cakrabheda*), has been shown by Shizuka Sasaki to be in reality a virtual universality of opinion that the only true cause of schism, at least in the times after the Buddha's nirvāṇa, is failure to hold joint rituals (*karmabheda*).⁴⁵ On the other hand, this virtual uniformity of opinion suggests that the explicit position of the Mahāsāṃghika in this regard cannot serve as evidence for its particular connection with a nascent Mahāyāna movement.

We have been concerned so far mostly with generalities of received wisdom, accepted ideas which I suggest can no longer be accepted. It might be helpful to briefly indicate here in particular why I have found myself unable to accept many of the ideas of perhaps the two most influential recent scholars of Mahāyāna history, Hirakawa Akira and Étienne Lamotte. The most characteristic ideas of Hirakawa and Lamotte are, respectively, that stūpa worship implies a lay community at the heart of the earliest Mahāyāna, and that Mahāyāna texts are anti-clerical. At least for Lamotte, moreover, these two ideas are not unrelated.

According to Buddhist canon law, the putatively normative stipulations of the Vinayas, the distinction between laity and monastics is defined by the difference in the precepts they take. A monk has taken the primary and secondary initiations (*pravrajya* and *upasampadā*), and has vowed to uphold a set of monastic rules (the *prātimokṣa*). A lay follower of Buddhism has taken the three refuges (in the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha) and perhaps five, or eight, vows. In addition, the

⁴⁴ The situation is nuanced by the existence of the categories of *samānasamvāsaka* and *nānāsamvāsaka* monks. See Kieffer-Pülz 1993:52–54, and Chung and Kieffer-Pülz 1997:15. The constellation of *saṃghabheda*, *nikāyabheda*, *cakrabheda*, *karmabheda*, *samānasamvāsaka* and *nānāsamvāsaka* deserves to be thoroughly (re)investigated.

⁴⁵ Sasaki 1992, 1993.

layman or laywoman may vow to give up not only forbidden sexual activity but all sexual activity whatsoever. One who takes the three refuges, or more, is called an *upāsaka* (male lay disciple) or *upāsikā* (female lay disciple).⁴⁶ There would in addition of course be those who casually gave alms and so forth, but these are not considered or recognized to be Buddhist lay supporters in any formal way. In spite of the availability of this terminology, many Mahāyāna sūtras generally seem to prefer the set of terms *pravrajita* and *gṛhastha*, that is, renunciant and householder, a distinction that requires separate discussion.

Richard Robinson has suggested that rather than these technical and strict categories a more useful distinction is that between “laicizing” and “monachizing,” and “secularizing” and “asceticizing.”⁴⁷ By this Robinson means to emphasize tendencies toward lay participation or lay control, as opposed to monastic control, or a greater concern with worldly activities or values as opposed to the values of renunciation and ascetic practice. There is quite a bit of grey space in Robinson’s definition, but it serves to highlight the fact that a strict distinction between lay and monastic, regardless of the roles the individuals play in the social life of the community, can be misleading. His distinction allows us to speak of an asceticized laity, for example a householder who vows to give up sex with his wife altogether, or secularized monastics, for example a monk who lives at a royal court.

Lamotte, who strongly advocated the idea that the Mahāyāna represents the triumph of lay aspirations in Buddhism,⁴⁸ used the expression “anti-clerical” to characterize early Mahāyāna sūtras, pointing specifically in his influential paper on the subject to the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā*,

⁴⁶ Let us recall the words of La Vallée Poussin yet again 1925:20: “Scholars set up between monk, novice and lay people a difference of degree, not of nature. All three are *sāmvarikas*, people who have accepted a *samvara* [vow—JAS]. . . All three possess the ‘morality of engagement,’ *samādāntaśīla*, the morality which consists not in the simple avoidance of sin but in the resolution to refrain from it.”

⁴⁷ Robinson 1965–66:25–26.

⁴⁸ He flatly stated this in Lamotte 1955:86: “The advent of the Mahāyāna consecrated the triumph of lay aspirations.”

which he calls an “anti-clerical tract.”⁴⁹ It is true that the single verse he quotes appears to be a violent criticism of monks,⁵⁰ but a glance at the context makes it quite clear that the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā* is not criticizing monks in general and is far from anti-clerical—rather quite the opposite. The text is concerned with (future) evil and degenerate monks, and the decay of the true teaching. In this sense the text might be considered more a reactionary document than a revolutionary one. What we see here is not anti-clericalism, but again rather the opposite: a concern with the purification of the clergy, and the related assertion of its superiority and rightful place as the sole legitimate representative of Buddhist orthodoxy. I have addressed this theme in another paper,⁵¹ and observe there how pervasive this ideology is in Buddhism, not only in Mahāyāna sūtras, but even in earlier canonical texts belonging to the Nikāya/Āgama corpus.

If, as I have argued, the Mahāyāna came into existence and persisted within pre-existing Buddhist social and institutional structures, it would follow that all monastic members of the Mahāyāna should have been associated with a traditional ordination lineage. I have further suggested that the Mahāyāna texts must have been written by monks, and have defined my notion of a Mahāyāna community as one constituted by the authors of these texts. There may, of course, have also (or instead) been another type of Mahāyāna community, but it would be incumbent upon whomever asserted this to be the case to show how this could have been so. Hirakawa Akira is probably the most influential of those who do not believe the earliest Mahāyāna to have been a monastic movement, and he suggests that formal Mahāyāna Buddhist social units did exist independently of the traditional sectarian saṅghas. He has offered an alternative solution to our questions, centering on the suggestion that what made such non-monastic Mahāyāna groups possible was their orientation around stūpa worship.

⁴⁹ Lamotte 1954:379.

⁵⁰ He gives no reference, but the verse is in fact to be found in Finot 1901:28.17–18.

⁵¹ See Silk forthcoming.

Hirakawa holds the Mahāyāna to have been a movement promoted in contrast to Nikāya communities by non-ordained people who devoted themselves to stūpa worship.⁵² One of the main presuppositions behind Hirakawa's thinking on this subject is the contrast between Nikāya Buddhism and the Mahāyāna, in which he was perhaps influenced by the writings of Nalinaksha Dutt.⁵³ The importance of this should be clear. If we compare, as we inevitably must, Mahāyāna Buddhism with its ubiquitous background, mistaken ideas about that background or pre-existing Buddhism will lead to erroneous conclusions about the situation of the Mahāyāna. In one particular regard I think it is precisely here that Hirakawa has gone astray.

Hirakawa's ideas are based on a very wide reading in the Vinaya literatures, Āgamas, and Mahāyāna sūtras. Basically stated, his position is that the Mahāyāna grew out of lay communities institutionally external to the Nikāya Buddhist communities. These lay communities grew up around stūpas not associated with any Nikāya Buddhist sect, and the lay groups managed and administered the stūpas. Gradually they infiltrated the monastic communities, and in response to this there was a transformation within the monastic communities in which some of these outside ideas and practices were adopted. This is the genesis of the Mahāyāna.

Hirakawa's argument for this theory runs as follows: According to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, just before the death of the Buddha he forbade monastic participation in the stūpa cult, ruling that this was

⁵² I translate as "Nikāya community" Hirakawa's Japanese expression *buha kyōdan*. Although Hirakawa has published a certain number of articles in English, and an English translation of one half of his popular survey of Indian Buddhism has appeared (Hirakawa 1990), I refer in all cases to his latest Japanese publications, on the assumption that these present his most recent and considered views. He has, moreover, been publishing a series of Collected Works in which many of his older studies are reprinted, sometimes with some modifications. When newer versions of old papers are available, I generally refer to the more updated publication. In the main, the ideas discussed in the present context are found in Hirakawa 1954 (rpt. 1989).

⁵³ Hirakawa seldom refers to Western scholarly works, but does occasionally take note of Dutt 1930—not however in Hirakawa 1954.

the domain of the laity. In addition, since the cult of the stūpa consists in worship offered with flowers, perfumes, dance, and music, it would not have been possible for monks to participate, since such activities were forbidden to them by the Vinaya. In addition, the fact that there are no inscriptions on stūpa sites identifying a stūpa as belonging to a particular sect proves that stūpas were not the domain of the monastic community. All of this shows that, despite some suggestions that the Mahāyāna grew up from within specific sects of Nikāya Buddhism, it could not have been Nikāya sect monks who created the Mahāyāna. It must have been lay people who were the managers of the stūpas.⁵⁴

Gregory Schopen has shown conclusively that the standard interpretation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*'s prohibition of monastic stūpa worship is wrong.⁵⁵ The sūtra is far from prohibiting monastic worship of stūpas, since the prohibition applies only to participation in the actual funeral ceremony, and moreover may apply not to all monks but only to Ānanda, and not to all funerals but only to that of the Buddha. Be that as it may, it is clear that there are no doctrinal grounds, at least in earlier literature, for the idea that monks were prohibited from participation in stūpa rites. Schopen has also shown elsewhere that in fact stūpas were a common if not central feature of Indian Buddhist monastery life, and that the main stūpas of monastic sites did in fact belong to specific sects of Sectarian Buddhism.⁵⁶ As far as the

⁵⁴ I believe we can lay out Hirakawa's argument rather clearly almost in his own words: Hirakawa 1954 (1989):377: Because lay believers (*zaike shinja*) erected the stūpa of the Buddha, and distributed his *śarīra* (relics), therefore (*yue ni*) in the time when the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* was redacted in the primitive Saṅgha the believers (*shinja*) were responsible for the administration of the stūpas (*buttō no keiei iji*), and bhikṣus were not directly involved. Because Vinayas of the sects (*buha*) discuss stūpas they were taken care of by the Nikāya Buddhist communities (*buha kyōdan*) in the Nikāya Buddhist Age (*buha bukkyō jidai*—whatever that is!). At the same time, there were many independent stūpas not connected with sects (*buha*). The many stūpas with dedicatory inscriptions which do not record a sect name proves there were stūpas not connected to a sect.

⁵⁵ Schopen 1991.

⁵⁶ See for example Schopen 1979 and 1985.

prohibition to participate in dance, the offering of flowers and so on, Sasaki Shizuka has shown that this rule is not in the oldest stratum of the Vinaya tradition, and that even once introduced a specific exception was made for offerings to the Buddha, including stūpa offerings.⁵⁷ Given this, Hirakawa's argument against the monastic basis of stūpa worship can be shown to lack evidence, and with this falls the main pillar of his argument for the lay origins of the Mahāyāna. We may mention in addition the idea that only lay people would have been able to afford to endow such expensive structures as stūpas. Here again, Schopen has repeatedly demonstrated that contrary to the impression traditionally derived from a reading of the Vinayas, monks were not at all the completely penniless renunciants we sometimes romantically like to imagine them to have been. Some monastics seem to have been wealthy patrons, and perfectly capable of endowing expensive structures, and moreover of recording this fact in inscriptions carved on those structures.⁵⁸

To be fair, Hirakawa has in fact repeatedly offered extremely detailed and learned arguments for the theories I have summarily critiqued here. A full critique worthy of his arguments would be involved and lengthy, and I am happy to refer here to the detailed studies of Sasaki in this regard.⁵⁹ Moreover, the model Hirakawa suggests is not necessarily his alone. A sociological study of a new religious movement has clearly stated the presuppositions as follows:⁶⁰

New movements in religion tend, in the nature of things, to be the product of lay initiative. They have often arisen as responses to what have been perceived as deficiencies in the clergy, and often as a challenge—expressed or implicit—to priestly dominance. In effect, that challenge has usually been a demand for opportunities of more open access to spiritual resources, accompanied by distrust of complicated liturgies and elaborate doctrines which the priests alone are

⁵⁷ Sasaki 1991.

⁵⁸ That monks and nuns of high status made many endowments was already pointed out, for example, by Njamasch 1974:281–282. However, she seems to resist the conclusion that such monks possess personal wealth (p. 283).

⁵⁹ Most accessible is his English article Sasaki 1997.

⁶⁰ Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994:232.

permitted to claim fully to understand. The lay impulse has been to seek more immediate spiritual help with less of the manipulative apparatus in which priestly classes tend to invest. Consciously or unconsciously, the lay movement seeks a reorientation concerning the vital focus of spiritual endeavor (for example, by emphasis on faith rather than on ritual performances). Priests seek to preserve orthodoxy and become custodians of sacred objects and places. They mark off their purported piety by distinctive means of training, by tonsure, dress, and ritual routines, all of which lead them to distance themselves from ordinary people and everyday affairs which not infrequently they see as mundane, and perhaps even as a source of pollution. In such circumstances, laymen are sometimes prompted to seek new means by which to acquire protection from the untoward and for new sources of reassurance about salvation (in whatever form salvation may, in their culture, be conceived). Such a growing divergence of orientation is likely to be exacerbated if a priesthood—purporting to offer indispensable service—in itself becomes cynical, corrupt, and self-indulgent. A process of this kind leads a disenchanted laity either to have recourse to competing agents who claim to offer assistance toward salvation, or to take spiritual affairs into their own hands.⁶¹

I do not mean to imply that Hirakawa has knowingly borrowed a model from the sociology of religion, but rather I want to suggest that this model is fundamentally taken for granted in much of the thinking concerning religious history, especially that which is seen to relate to the evolution of “sects.” There is little point in speculating on the general applicability of the model in religious studies as a whole, but even if the model were generally applicable, it would remain true that it need not necessarily apply to each and every case.

⁶¹ The authors go on, in the following paragraph, to make explicit the application of their remarks: “The process outlined in the abstract applies to various historical instances, conspicuously to the history of Protestantism. The Reformation, whilst not an initially lay movement, met, with its doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the aspirations of the laity, whilst subsequent dissenting and schismatic movements sought more direct access to saving grace, and wider opportunities for lay spiritual experience. Such struggles between priests and laity are by no means confined to Christian history: they have occurred in various religious contexts.” The authors continue, in an overly credulous manner, I believe, to discuss the issue of the schism between the Nichiren Shōshū and the Sōka Gakkai, relying almost entirely it seems on polemical materials (in English!) published by the respective parties, primarily the latter.

Now, even if we posit Mahāyāna Buddhism as a movement—or, I should prefer to say at least for the early Mahāyāna, movement-s, plural—which has doctrinal but no institutional existence as such, which is neither a *nikāya*, an orthodox ordination lineage, nor a *vāda*, a school defined by doctrines, but rather a sort of meta-level movement, which drew its adherents from monastic Buddhism but adherence to which in no way contradicted the established sectarian identification of its followers, and which was co-local, compatible with, and existed within, the complex of these Buddhist communities, distinguished from non-Mahāyāna primarily on the level of philosophical doctrine or “systematics,” some emphases in practice, forms of literary or artistic expression, and some aspects of mythology and cosmology, and even if we accept that it was only in this realm of doctrine and rhetoric that Hīnayāna Buddhism existed, without any real-world existence in India or elsewhere, I think our quest for definition has still fallen into a maze from which it might not escape.

Even if we accept that the distinction between Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna we find in the works of Indian authors has, from a descriptive rather than a polemical point of view, been ill-drawn, the existence of the very distinction itself fixes the basic and hence following questions in a dichotomous frame, setting Mahāyāna against non-Mahāyāna. In other words, the question “What is Mahāyāna Buddhism?” still means more or less the same thing as “What is the relation between Mahāyāna and the Buddhism of the sects?”

By failing to question the very framework which lies behind the dualistic distinction which we recognize as very likely nothing more than polemical, we are casting the whole question of the identity of Mahāyāna Buddhism in entirely the wrong terms.

Another way to look at the problem is to suggest that an examination of the underlying models of definition and classification which have, albeit no doubt subconsciously, guided scholars so far may reveal failures of their theories to adequately account for all the relevant data. Since a theory is nothing more than a structure or construct within which to organize data, such failures are fatal. An examination of the

possible models for definition and classification may likewise suggest new approaches to the problem.

Philosophers of language distinguish between two basic types of definitions, “Stipulative” definitions and “Lexical” definitions. In the former, one stipulates exactly what one means by a certain term, whether or not that sense is intuitive or even acceptable to others. In many cases we must rely on stipulative definitions, and in fields like science and law, they are usually essential. For instance, laws or contracts without stipulated definitions are unenforceable and often meaningless. On the other hand, for many uses stipulative definitions are obviously *not* what are needed. In most cases, in fact, we could not carry out ordinary communication if we were to rely on stipulative definitions. What we are concerned with in these cases is “lexical” definition.

Lexical definition is what a dictionary aims for. How is a word most generally used? What do most users of a word intend by it? What do they intend it to mean? A dictionary aims, among other things, to formalize for us the consensus of a word’s usage. One problem, of course, is that this meaning is often extremely hard to pin down. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, for example, defines “red” as

Any of a group of colors that may vary in lightness and saturation, whose hue resembles that of blood; the hue of the long-wave end of the spectrum; one of the additive or light primaries; one of the psychological primary hues, evoked in the normal observer by the long-wave end of the spectrum.

It is clear how deeply contextualized this definition is. “Red” resembles blood. How close does something have to be to “resemble” something else? What is the “long-wave” end of the light spectrum? How long is long?⁶² The same dictionary says that a “hero” is “any man noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose,” or “a person prominent in some event, field, period, or cause by reason of his special

⁶² It may be that there are technical definitions of “long wave light” in optics, stated for instance in terms of a range of Ångströms. This simply makes this part of the definition into a virtual tautology, however.

achievements or contributions.” But what is “nobility of purpose”? Are not villains also “prominent”? What is the problem here?

One problem is that this type of definition aims at identifying an *essence*. These definitions aim to locate one or a very few characteristics that are definitive. And this is very problematic. A definition is a description of a *class*. All members of a class are included in that class because the definition applies to them. Classes are defined by definitions, and what definitions do is define classes.⁶³ But a definition will not only qualify a given particular for *inclusion* in a class; it must also *exclude* other instances. A definition tells us what qualifies as a member of a class, and also what does *not* qualify. That is one reason that the definition of “hero” has a problem. The word “prominent”—which the same dictionary defines as “widely known”—does not exclude villains. And of course, our common usage tells us that villains are not heroes. While this definition is perhaps sufficiently *inclusive*, it is not sufficiently *exclusive*.

And what of essences? A good definition lets us make *explicit* the *implicit* character of the object of the definition, and establish its *unity as an object*. In other words, it allows us to include and exclude appropriately. Generally speaking, we ordinarily assume that we can do this by locating the definitive features or characteristics of the object of our definition, the feature or group of features which are *necessary and sufficient* to determine membership in the class. This is what we generally mean by *essence*. If such features exist, we can establish what is called a *Monothetic Class* (see below). When we are using real language, however, we generally do not function in this way. We work, as the dictionary quoted above recognizes, by associating *resemblances*. We work by *analogy*. Something is “red” if it resembles—in the appropriate ways—other things we think of as

⁶³ It is worth stressing here that while individuals may evolve, classes do not. The characteristics of an individual may change such that the individual may no longer be included as a member of a certain class, but the class itself cannot change.

“red.”⁶⁴ But how can we formalize that understanding? Or, first, why would we *want* to formalize it?

Of course, we generally don’t need to formalize definitions. Most readers have probably never looked up the word “red” in a dictionary. Why should one? We usually only need to resort to definitions in borderline cases, or when there is a problem. But sometimes it is important to resort to a definition, and so we sometimes do want to formalize our understanding. How can we do this when we cannot find an essence, a feature or set of features which is both necessary and sufficient to qualify an object for inclusion in a class?

In developing his philosophy of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein spoke about what he called “Family Resemblances” [*Philosophical Investigations* §67].⁶⁵ How do we know, Wittgenstein wondered, that something is a “game.” What ties all sorts of games together into a class? Wittgenstein of course was not concerned to formalize the similarity he spoke about, being primarily interested in logical and natural language problems. But a coincidence of intellectual history brought together these ideas of Wittgenstein with those of scholars who *are* concerned to formalize such “Family Resemblances,” namely the biological taxonomists. The problem for such scholars is really quite simple. What animals (or for some, plants) are related to others? What forms a species? The connection between Wittgenstein’s ideas and those of the biological taxonomists led to the suggestion of utilizing a different approach to classification which does away with the requirement for necessary and sufficient conditions. This approach is that of the *Polythetic Class*. The Polythetic Class, of course, contrasts with the Monothetic Class mentioned above.

⁶⁴ I leave out of consideration here the fact that all humans very closely agree on what is a good example of “red” and what is not. The psychology and neuroscience of this is rather complicated, but the result is a well established fact. See Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1996:157–171, esp. 168; the classic study is Berlin and Kay 1969.

⁶⁵ Wittgenstein 1958:32.

In a Polythetic Class, to be considered a member of the class each object must possess a large (but unspecified) number of features or characteristics which are considered relevant for membership in that class. And each such set of features must be possessed by a large number of members of the class. But—and this is the key—there is no set of features which must be possessed by *every* member of the class. There is no one feature or set of features necessary and sufficient for inclusion in the class. When a class has no single feature or set of features common to all its members, it is called Fully Polythetic.

This may be expressed in over-simplified form graphically:⁶⁶

	Individuals					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Characteristics	A		A	A		
	B	B	B			
	C	C		C		
		D	D	D		
					F	F
					G	G
					H	H

Here individuals 1, 2, 3, 4 form a fully polythetic class, while 5 and 6 form a monothetic class.

One can see how this is an attempt to formalize the notion of Family Resemblances. We can think about it this way: How does one define a “family”? We might want to consider features such as marriage or blood relation, but what of adopted children? We might want to consider cohabitation, but of course, many family members live apart. And so on. Any single feature is open to the challenge of counter-example, but at the same time our classification must also *exclude*, so we cannot simply rely on exhaustive listing of possible features, lest we be forced therefore to include individuals we want to exclude. So while

⁶⁶ Needham 1975:357.

rejecting the “necessary and sufficient features” model, by collecting a large number of features we can establish a pattern, a resemblance between individuals. And in fact, many numerical taxonomists try to formalize this process to the point where it is almost automatic, that is, where the degree of resemblance can be calculated numerically.

There is of course a difference between natural sciences and social or humanistic studies. While for the most part natural scientists try to select features which are themselves discrete empirical particulars (for instance, does an animal have an internal or external skeleton?), even for them an element of the *ad hoc* remains.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, despite a certain ambiguity, in many cases natural scientists *can* select monothetically defined features. But for those of us interested in studying social phenomena, the very features which we must consider will themselves often constitute polythetic classes.⁶⁸

A particularly good case for the application of this method concerns the notion of religion. Religion has been notoriously difficult to define, though it is not necessary to recount that history here. Rather we should direct our attention to the question of the *method* of definition. What we want to do, in a nutshell, is find a definition which will allow us to include in the class of religion all those phenomena which we feel are religions or religious, and exclude those we feel are not. In other words, we want to formalize our lexical definitions. Many previous attempts have failed because counter-examples could be produced, because the suggested definitions excluded individuals we sensed, as users of the word “religion,” to be religions, or because they included individuals we felt were *not* religions; that is, they failed either to properly include or properly exclude. Sometimes this has caused funny pseudo-problems. Most people consider Buddhism to be a religion, yet

⁶⁷ For example, a researcher might ask, is or is not a single-celled creature tolerant to 0.5 ppm of saline in solution? But why pick the number 0.5 ppm? Is it not totally arbitrary, *ad hoc*? Another example is found in the way morphological features are recognized by those attempting cladistic analyses. Holes and bumps on bones (“large fenestra,” for instance) are recognized as significant in basically impressionistic ways.

⁶⁸ Needham 1975:364.

many Buddhists do not consider their object of ultimate concern to be God or a god. So, some scholars have suggested that Buddhism is not, in fact, a religion, but rather a philosophy. These scholars tried to impose a stipulative definition where a lexical definition belonged. But those who were willing to let the data direct the theory, instead of letting the theory or definition make them manipulate their data, realized therefore that theism is obviously not a good touchstone for the definition of a religion. The suggestion that Buddhism is not a religion is an example of failure to properly *include* an object in the class.

On the other hand, if we look to the functionalists, those who suggest that religion is what produces meaning and focus in one's life, what organizes one's social interactions and so on, we have another problem—not this time of *inclusion* but of *exclusion*. A theistic definition did not enable us to include Buddhism as a religion, which we want to do. A functional definition, on the other hand, may prevent us from *excluding* American Baseball, for example, from the class of religions. For of course, baseball provides a source of great, perhaps even ultimate, meaning for many people, it can structure their worldview and their social interactions, can produce and focus meaning, and so on. But we should expect our definition of religion to exclude baseball, and so while the functional features which might determine inclusion in the class are certainly important, they cannot be necessary and sufficient. A polythetic approach, on the other hand, allows us to incorporate as many features as we feel necessary, without making any one particular feature decisive. This is its great strength.

Before we try to apply this all to the problem of Mahāyāna Buddhism, let us make the assumption, which I think is not radical, that Mahāyāna Buddhism is a kind of Buddhism, and that there are kinds of Buddhism which are not Mahāyāna. But this is not necessarily the same thing as saying that Mahāyāna is a species of Buddhism, an important distinction. For what, indeed, is the relation between Mahāyāna Buddhism and the rest of Buddhism, or between Mahāyāna and the larger class of Buddhism of which it is a part?

When defining individual religions or religious traditions, we are usually talking about a *structurally* different type of class than the class of religion. The class “religion” qualifies instances for membership purely on what is called by the biologists *phenetic* grounds.⁶⁹ Phenetic relationships are relationships of similarity, which are defined strictly synchronically, since they indicate a product. There need be no historical relationship whatsoever between two instances for them to both be members of the same class. In the study of religion an instance of this type of relation is what we call phenomenological similarity. As van der Leeuw has discussed in such interesting detail,⁷⁰ we can talk about instances of prayer, of asceticism, and so on in traditions which have had no historical contact, and in the same way we can talk about “religions” without implying in any way a historical connection between the world’s religions. In other words, we can group together instances without regard for their history. Their present similarity is what is of interest.⁷¹

In contrast to this, *phyletic* relationships show the course of evolution, and thus indicate a process. Two individuals related *phyletically* share some commonly inherited features from a common ancestor, and they may share this feature even if their evolutionary paths diverged in the ancient past. If the common ancestry is relatively recent, we speak of *shared derived characteristics*,⁷² which link two or more individuals, but separate them from the rest of their common ancestors. Such recent relations, which are defined diachronically, are termed “cladistic.”

So we have two basic categories: First are relationships which are synchronic, in which two individuals may be grouped together on the basis of ancient common inheritances or common chance similarities,

⁶⁹ Bailey 1983:256.

⁷⁰ van der Leeuw 1938.

⁷¹ These are termed by the biologists homoplasies, similar characteristics independently evolved. When the origins of the similar characteristics are independently acquired they are termed convergent, when independently evolved parallel.

⁷² Technically called *synapomorphies*; Gould 1983:358.

adventitious similarities which have been independently acquired by the individual. Second are relations based on common similarities due to a genetic and historical link which produced in both individuals a shared innovation, not shared with their common ancestor.

Phenetic—that is, synchronic, phenomenological—classification is possible for all groups, whether or not they have any previous, that is to say historical, connection, but cladistic or phyletic classification requires historical inference. When we talk about the class “religion,” we are of course concerned with phenetic relationships, but when we study a given religious tradition, it is usually the cladistic form of classification that we are interested in, which is to say, historical links are vital.⁷³

We can certainly relate some traditions *within* the class “Buddhism” to each other from some perspectives by means of their shared derived characteristics—that is, cladistically. Thus, broadly speaking Mongolian Buddhism can be linked to Tibetan Buddhism by, among other things, their shared derived characteristics, or their shared innovations. We can draw a tree-diagram—what is called by the biologists a cladogram—illustrating such relations.⁷⁴

But does this same approach apply to the object we call Mahāyāna Buddhism? Does the pair of Mahāyāna and other-than-Mahāyāna form, as many writers on Buddhism seem to assume, what is technically called in cladistics a “sister group,” that is two lineages more closely related to each other than to any other lineages?⁷⁵ Or is the whole question being asked in a misleading way? Is it possible that scholars who have considered the question have somehow assumed some version of a model which mirrors the biologist’s cladistic classification? Naturally it is unlikely that their motivation for this is to be

⁷³ This is not true, by the way, with classifications of *types* of religions, such as “New Age” Religions. Such classifications, like the classification “religion” itself, almost always rely on phenetic relationships.

⁷⁴ On the application of biological concepts to other fields of study, see the very interesting essays in Hoenigswald and Wiener 1987.

⁷⁵ Cf. Gould 1983:357.

found in biological classification itself, and while it is obvious that one possible source is an analogical extension of the Protestant Reformation idea, and the relation between Catholicism and Protestantism, it is also far from impossible that general notions of necessary and sufficient conditions and of species classification have led scholars to certain assumptions. It is these very assumptions which I think we must question. And so we come back to our core question: Just what *is* the relationship of Mahāyāna to the rest of Buddhism?

The definition we seek of Mahāyāna Buddhism must be a lexical definition. It would be pointless for us to suggest a stipulative definition, although such stipulative definitions offered for example in traditional texts like that of Yijing may certainly become data for our quest. We want to determine what are generally agreed to be the limits of the class, in this case of Mahāyāna Buddhism. And this class should be defined not monothetically but polythetically, through a large number of features which cumulatively circumscribe the class. I suggest the place we will look for features which will lead us to a definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism should in the first place be the Mahāyāna sūtras.

But—and this is not as meaningless as it might at first sound—Mahāyāna sūtras are Buddhist texts, and all Buddhist texts are Buddhist texts. In other words, we assume that all Buddhist texts are Buddhist—but really without knowing what we mean by this, and without having formalized this feeling. This suggests that rather than asking what makes a Mahāyāna Buddhist text Mahāyāna it might be better to ask what makes it both Buddhist and Mahāyāna. Or we might visualize the problem in a quite different way: is there any way we can localize Mahāyāna texts within some imaginary multi-dimensional space which we call “Buddhism”?

If we imagine Buddhism as a multi-dimensional space, and we do not prejudge the locations of different kinds of Buddhism—with for example Theravāda in one corner and Zen far away in another—but instead start our thinking on the level of individual texts, I think we would quickly realize that various texts would be located at various points in this multi-dimensional matrix, some texts being located more closely to each other than to a third type of text. Of course, there

can be no such thing as an absolute location, but only a location relative to other objects in the space (just as is the case in the three dimensions of our physical universe). This is related to the “degree of resemblance” calculations which, as I mentioned above, numerical taxonomists employ. Slightly more thought would show us that the problem is more complicated still. For what are the criteria by means of which we would locate our texts in this space? In fact, there is an infinite number of possible criteria we might want to use to locate the objects of our study, and an infinite number of ways of relating our data points to each other, and thus an infinite number of multi-dimensional matrices. For instance, we should recognize that even the unit “text” is itself amenable to further analysis and localization. Let us consider the example of one sūtra, the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, just for the sake of argument. We have a Sanskrit version (in this case only one nearly complete manuscript, with a few variant fragments, but sometimes we will have more), a Tibetan translation, and a number of Chinese versions, not to mention a commentary to the text extant in several versions, quotations in other works, and so on. From one perspective, we would expect all of these to be located very closely together in our imaginary space; they are all versions of, or intimately related to, the “same text.” From another perspective, however, if we are interested in translation vocabulary for instance, we might also have good reasons to want to relate the Chinese translation of the *Kāśyapaparivarta* of one translator more closely to other translations of the same translator than to other Chinese versions of the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, and certainly more closely than to the Tibetan translation of the same text. Or again, a text with doctrinal content might from that perspective be related more closely to another of similar content, the Heart Sūtra (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*) with the Diamond Sūtra (*Vajracchedikā*), for instance, while if we were interested in the same text used liturgically we might group it with quite another text or texts to which it might be unrelated in terms of its content but with which it may be used together or similarly in ritual, the same *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* with the Smaller *Sukhāvātīvyūha*, perhaps. So the sorts of groupings the data will produce will depend on

what we are asking of our data. There will not be one final definitive grouping, that is to say, no one unique localization of our objects within our imaginary multi-dimensional space. And the more flexible the organization of our data, the more comprehensively we will be able to understand and classify its internal relations. To put this another way, none of the objects we are interested in—no matter how we are likely to define those objects, singly or as groups—will be related to another object or set of objects in a single, unique way. The relation will depend on what aspects of the objects we choose to relate every time we ask a question. And if we map the relations between objects within our multi-dimensional space, the geography of that space will therefore be determined by the combination of objects and aspects in question. Since we have multiple objects and virtually limitless aspects to compare—constrained only by the imagination which generates our questions—no unique mapping or solution is even theoretically possible.

There are in fact established techniques available in the so-called Social Sciences for thinking about such problems. One of the most important numerical techniques is called Cluster Analysis. What cluster analysis enables one to do is rationally deal with a large amount of data, clustering it into more compact forms for easier manageability. The clusters may be defined in any number of ways. It might be possible for us, for instance, to select features, such as the occurrence of doctrinal concepts, key words, stock phrases or the like, and code them 1 or 0 for Mahāyāna or non-Mahāyāna. But given our goals, one of which is to avoid prejudicing the relationship between Mahāyāna and other forms of Buddhism as this monothetic classification would, such an approach can be seen to embody the same sort of flaw inherent in previous thinking on the subject.⁷⁶ A much better approach would be to cluster discretely rather than cumulatively, that is, to measure the presence or absence of given factors, and then measure the total clustered factors individually, not additively. The clusters which result

⁷⁶ This is also the same flaw to which cladistic analyses are prone.

would, then, allow for the formation of a polythetic class.⁷⁷ Naturally, the mathematics behind such statistical methods of multivariate analysis are sophisticated, and I do not pretend to have even a rudimentary understanding of the technical details. My wish here is to introduce the broadest, most general outlines of the procedure, and to appeal for a consideration by scholars of Buddhism of this new way of conceptualizing the very nature of the problem, rather than to offer a definitive array of statistical techniques to carry out the details of the project.

Let us step back for a moment to the self-evident claim offered above: Mahāyāna Buddhism is Buddhism. As such, not only should instances of Mahāyāna Buddhism be related and relatable to other objects in the same class, but to other objects in the larger class “Buddhism” as well. Just how those Mahāyāna Buddhist objects are related to Buddhist objects will provide us an answer to our question concerning the relation between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Buddhism as a whole—that is to say, the question What is Mahāyāna Buddhism?

Another way of putting this is as follows: If we start with the assumption that there is something called Mahāyāna, but we do not know what its features are, we will want to look at the objects which we think might be definitive of Mahāyāna and extract from those the qualities which group or cluster them together. Moreover, if we think these same or other objects might also belong somehow to another set—even on a different logical level, for example, the set of Buddhism at large—we will want to have a way of determining to what extent the object is Mahāyāna and to what extent it is simply Buddhist. That is, what we will be looking for is not a presence or absence of Mahāyāna, but a question of degree of identification with some cluster, or even better of general location within the whole space, in this case of “Buddhism.”

The only attempt I know of to do anything even remotely like this is that of Shizutani Masao,⁷⁸ who looked not at Buddhist literature in general but rather tried to stratify Mahāyāna sūtras chronologically

⁷⁷ See Bailey 1994.

⁷⁸ Shizutani 1974.

into what he termed Primitive Mahāyāna (*genshi daijō*) and Early Mahāyāna (*shoki daijō*) on the basis of the presence or absence of certain concepts and technical terms. Unfortunately, as far as I can see, he approached the problem purely impressionistically and without any rigorous method. Moreover, I have grave doubts about the possibility of establishing even a relative chronology of this literature purely on the basis of internal evidence, not to mention the backward methodology of such an approach. Nevertheless, careful reading of Shizutani's study might yield valuable clues for future research.

What I suggest instead in no way precludes taking into account the age or relative age of our sources; it simply does not depend on such a determination. The comprehensive comparison of multiple aspects of a large number of objects will allow us to see the multiple natures of these objects, their relative similarities and differences, in a comparative light. Let us again consider an example. Individuals do not hold consistent sets of ideological or political viewpoints. Not all vegetarians are opposed to the death penalty, not all abortion rights activists oppose nuclear power, and so on. The complex make up of ideologies which characterizes any given population, however, can be studied statistically. It is a similar census which I suggest for the population of "Buddhism," the objects constituting which include texts, art objects, and so on.

Once we reject the groundless assumption that Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna Buddhism are related in the fashion of cladistic classification, then we are freed to explore other dimensions of the definitions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. We are enabled and empowered to think in terms of degrees of similarity and relatedness, rather than simply the dichotomy related/unrelated. This in turn enables us to think more fluidly about the ways in which, for example, a Mahāyāna Buddhist text may borrow literary conceits of earlier literature, or a mythological episode, while reformulating the doctrinal content of the episode. It gives us a tool to think about multiple ways that one and the same object might be used, while the object itself remains essentially unchanged. A stone image of Śākyamuni may have different meanings in different ritual contexts, just as a textual pericope may shift its

meaning—or we should better say, have its meaning shifted—by its changing context. Such an appreciation gives us good tools for re-thinking problems such as the “transfer of merit” or the “perfections,” claimed as characteristic of Mahāyāna Buddhism but found in non-Mahāyāna literature as well, among a host of other possibilities.

This also enables us to deal with the problem, alluded to above, that very obviously much of the literature commonly cited in discussions of Mahāyāna Buddhism as that of “Sectarian Buddhism,” and surely not rarely implied to represent some pre-Mahāyāna ideas, in fact dates from a period after the rise of the Mahāyāna Buddhist movement. If we assume that Mahāyāna Buddhism arose in the first century of the Common Era—a reasonable dating which in reality we have very little or no evidence to justify—and we simultaneously recognize that no Chinese translation of Buddhist material predates that period, that the Pāli canon was not written down before the fifth century, although its redaction clearly predates that time, and so on, we must come to appreciate that even if we wish to be much more careful about our comparisons of Mahāyāna and pre-Mahāyāna materials than we have been heretofore, we will have a very tough time of it. To this we add the problem of contamination. If we revert to the previous assumption of a cladistic classification for a moment, and borrow here the model of the philologists’ cladogram, the stemma or tree diagram he has borrowed from the biologist in the first place, we will have to recognize that the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism reflects a heavily cross-contaminated situation. The materials to which we are comparing our extant Mahāyāna Buddhist literature may well have been written or revised in light of that very Mahāyāna Buddhist material itself, and vice versa ad infinitum. Even theoretically, there is no way to produce a clean schematic of the relations in question, any more than it would be possible to clarify a mixture in a glass after orange juice had been poured into soda, that mix poured into coffee, then added back into the orange juice, and so on. The contamination

is complete, its history irreversible.⁷⁹ This leaves us only with the possibility of clarifying various aspects of the phenetic, synchronic relations between objects of our interest. But this does not in any way mean that we are to ignore traditional information. Yijing—and of course he is not the only source—tells us that worship of bodhisattvas is definitive of Mahāyāna Buddhism. We need not take this, even if he so intended it, as a necessary and sufficient condition to accept it as one point in our data set, one object which is to be brought into conjunction with others. The same applies to the problem of the identification of a given text as, for example, a Mahāyāna sūtra. Chinese sūtra catalogues do not give us a definitive answer, but provide one feature to be taken into account in the process of formulating a polythetic definition. And so too for features such as the mention of emptiness, bodhisattvas, the perfections, and so on. With such tools in hand we may be able to approach anew the problem of the definition and classification of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In conclusion, let me explain what is behind the title of my paper, which I confess to have borrowed from authors more clever than I. I was inspired in the first place by the title of a paper by the paleontologist and biologist Stephen J. Gould, “What, If Anything, is a Zebra?”; Gould in turn had borrowed his title from a paper of Albert E. Wood, “What, if Anything, Is a Rabbit?”⁸⁰ What Gould wonders is whether the various stripped horses actually make up a cladistic group. If they do not, then strictly and cladistically speaking there is no such thing as a zebra. This line of thought got me thinking about Mahāyāna Buddhism. I first thought I could ask “What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?” because I wanted to know whether Mahāyāna Buddhism was cladistically related to non-Mahāyāna Buddhism. But what I have come to realize is that what we really want to know is how to locate Mahāyāna with respect to Buddhism as a whole, and as

⁷⁹ Of course, some history may be recoverable even from highly contaminated or hybridized examples. Some of the processes which led to an extant complex state may be traceable—but not all.

⁸⁰ Gould 1983; Wood 1957.

a part of that question we want to understand above all how objects are defined as “Mahāyāna” in the first place. But cladistics cannot help us here. Asking about the relation of Mahāyāna to Buddhism as a whole is closer to asking about the relation of the zebra to the category “animal” (or perhaps “mammal”). The tools we must use to approach the definition and classification of Mahāyāna Buddhism are much less rigid and dichotomous than cladistics, much more fluid, variable and flexible. And so, with an aesthetic reluctance but a methodological confidence, I concede that this incarnation of Gould’s title does not properly set the stage for the task facing us as we attempt to confront the problem of how to define Mahāyāna Buddhism. But after all, perhaps form may be permitted to trump content just this once. As a title “The Definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism as a Polythetic Category” seems sufficiently anaemic to justify the poetic licence.

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ASPECTS DU “SACERDOCE” EN SYRIE ANCIENNE: REMARQUES METHODOLOGIQUES ET EXAMEN D’UN CAS PARTICULIER

PAOLO XELLA

Summary

A historico-religious study focusing on “priesthood” and “priest” has to face many difficulties, in terms of terminology and of content. On the one hand, it is methodologically incorrect to link “priesthood” to debated modern concepts such as “religion” or “cult” which, like the former, need to be (even conventionally) defined each time for every particular culture, and not to be assumed as universal keys of historical understanding. On the other hand, previous studies on the topic—where the aim has been to determine latent forms and/or particular manifestations of “priesthood” in other cultures and also to write a “general history” of this phenomenon—exhibit the total historical irrelevance of such an approach, based only on our modern (Christian) concept of “priest(hood).” In order to limit ethnocentrism and, at the same time, to employ useful conceptual categories, new heuristic parameters must be found. In addition to the criterion indicated by J. Rüpké (the religious specialist as a control-agent within the framework of symbolic systems), I propose to distinguish between professional specialisation and practical (cultic) function. The case study I present here to illustrate some aspects and problems of this research is that of ancient Syrian (Ugaritic) culture, where “priests” in our meaning are difficult to be found, whereas a fully new concept emerges if we look at the issue from a functional (and “emic”) perspective.

Les études concernant le “sacerdoce,” dans toute la gamme de ses définitions et de ses manifestations, ont une longue histoire, tant dans le domaine de la théologie que dans celui de l’histoire des religions. De ce dernier point de vue, il est tout à fait évident que l’on a affaire à un terrain de recherche délicat et difficile où l’on retrouve, multipliés et diversifiés, tous les problèmes fondamentaux—de définition et de méthode—qui caractérisent toute approche scientifique de la religion.¹

¹ Cf. dernièrement les nombreuses études sur la méthode dans Bianchi 1994 et dans Geertz et McCutcheon 2000.

En effet, le terme “sacerdoce”—et les termes apparentés et/ou dérivés comme “prêtre,” “agent du culte,” “opérateur rituel,” “spécialiste religieux,” etc.—indépendamment de leur étymologie² et des formes attestées dans les langues occidentales, renvoie à un concept qui dépend étroitement de celui de “religion” et, si l’on veut, de celui de “culte.” Il est par conséquent tout à fait erroné, du point de vue méthodologique, d’orienter une enquête en s’appuyant sur la “religion” elle-même, terme/concept éternellement discuté (y compris en ce qui concerne la légitimité de sa définition!), afin d’y rapporter les notions de “sacerdoce” et de “prêtre.”³ Sur le plan sémantique, et en général sur le plan culturel, on est une fois de plus renvoyé à la tradition judéo-chrétienne et à la distinction plus ou moins explicite entre une sphère/dimension “religieuse” ou “sacrée” et une sphère “profane” ou “laïque,”⁴ qu’on a bien peu de chances de repérer comme telle non seulement—comme cela va de soi—auprès des cultures radicalement “autres” par rapport à la nôtre, mais aussi parmi les civilisations du Proche-Orient ancien et du monde classique en particulier qui, à la rigueur, sont censées être beaucoup plus proches de notre culture.

Comme l’observent Mary Beard et John North dans l’introduction à un récent volume consacré aux prêtres des religions païennes:

The priestly officials discussed in this volume bear no significant resemblance to the comforting image of the wise Christian pastor . . . they did not play the part (at least officially) of moral leaders; they were not involved with a congregation which looked to the priest for advice and guidance. Unlike the priests of Christianity and other modern world religions, who can communally yield power independently of (and sometimes in opposition to) the established political power in the state, pagan priests never (or only in exceptional circumstances) stood apart from the political order. There is hardly a sign of that—to us—familiar

² Cf. entre autres Mouterde 1962.

³ Dans ce cas, on viole ouvertement une des règles qui sont à la base de la méthodologie de la définition, c’est-à-dire, “the definiens must not include any expression that occurs in the definiendum, or that could be defined only in terms of it” (Penner et Yonan 1972:114ss.).

⁴ En particulier su ce sujet cf. Sabbatucci 1988 et déjà ses remarques sur *sacer* (Sabbatucci 1951–52). Voir aussi Neumann 1998.

clash between “church” and “state”, between priestly interests and the dominant political hierarchy.⁵

Les auteurs soulignent en outre le fait qu’en dépit des difficultés qui empêchent une détermination précise des traits communs aux prêtres païens, deux points au moins s’imposent à l’attention: la spécialisation parfois exaspérée des devoirs culturels et—ce que nous intéresse le plus ici—le fait que le personnel attaché au culte n’exerce presque jamais ses fonctions à temps plein:

... although the religious tasks themselves were apparently closely defined, they were not normally assigned to specialist full time practitioners. Most religious officials in the world combined priestly duties with other occupations. This was the case at all levels of society: peasant farmers or blacksmiths, say, might play their part as flute players or ritual water carriers; the major magistrates of the state would also function as priests of the major deities. In this sense priestly power was strikingly undifferentiated; *it was embedded within the social and political order.*⁶

Cette dernière constatation doit retenir toute notre attention, puisqu’elle montre, une fois de plus, combien il est dangereux d’appliquer nos catégories conceptuelles à d’autres réalités culturelles, sans avoir une conscience historique adéquate, même en visant à atténuer les effets de l’ethnocentrisme.

L’histoire des recherches à ce sujet offre un bon échantillon des erreurs et des échecs d’une certaine *scholarship* qui a eu la prétension d’écrire une “histoire” du sacerdoce en projetant en arrière et en dehors de notre culture cette catégorie conceptuelle avec des buts plus ou moins consciemment évolutionnistes. S’agissant précisément d’un domaine de recherche où, sans doute même plus que dans d’autres, il faut la plus grande attention et une extrême prudence afin d’éviter les risques de l’ethnocentrisme et des définitions préconçues, il vaut la peine de s’arrêter brièvement sur cet aspect du problème.

⁵ Beard et North 1990:2. Une évaluation critique de cet ouvrage et une mise au point de certaines questions liées à la notion de “sacerdoce” dans le monde ancien dans Tübingen Work Group 1993.

⁶ Beard et North 1990:3. Italiques miens.

Concernant le “sacerdoce,” on est confronté à une bibliographie générale assez limitée, mais relativement riche pour le monde hébraïque et chrétien, ainsi que pour d’autres religions anciennes (Grèce, Rome) et orientales (Proche et Extrême-Orient), avec quelques monographies et des travaux spécifiques sur des thèmes plus ou moins restreints et/ou des personnages particuliers. Face à ces études d’orientations différentes, ce qui frappe le plus, c’est précisément le nombre limité d’ouvrages d’ensemble explicitement consacrés à la problématique historique du sacerdoce, c’est-à-dire à la recherche sur le développement historique des formes et des fonctions “sacerdotales” dans les différentes cultures en rapport avec leur structure économique, politique et sociale. On vise généralement à isoler cette catégorie et à la traiter comme si elle avait un statut ontologique, méta-historique.

Mis à part les travaux les plus anciens et les monographies spécialisées, les noms qui reviennent toujours sont surtout ceux d’Edwin O. James (1955) et de Léopold Sabourin (1973),⁷ auteurs d’ouvrages sans aucun doute remarquables par leur érudition, mais dont les résultats sur le plan proprement historique sont décevants, à cause de l’approche fondamentalement phénoménologique qu’ils adoptent et les a-priori idéologiques qui inspirent leurs enquêtes. Concernant ce dernier point, les auteurs partent bien sûr de la notion moderne (occidentale, chrétienne) de sacerdoce et la projettent en arrière dans le temps et dans l’espace avec le but—plus ou moins ouvertement déclaré—de “reconstruire” une prétendue “histoire du sacerdoce” dans d’autres cultures, proches ou lointaines de nous, qui ont connu ou connaissent des réalités différentes, difficilement ou pas du tout comparables *sic et simpliciter* avec la notion de départ.

Il s’agit bel et bien d’une approche ouvertement inspirée d’une vision ethnocentrique, avec toutes les limites et les défauts de méthode qui lui sont inhérentes. Le “sacerdoce”—considéré en général et dans ses aspects socialement et éthiquement plus positifs—est évalué

⁷ Ce n’est pas du au hasard s’ils sont les deux seuls ouvrages cités dans la bibliographie de l’entrée “Priesthood” de l’*Encyclopedia* de M. Eliade (cf. Oxtoby 1987).

comme une institution connue par l'homme (plus ou moins consciemment) depuis toujours, dont on peut suivre *grasso modo* le développement linéaire: à partir de ses formes primordiales, imparfaites et "grossières" chez les peuples primitifs (dans ce cas, les guillemets sont omis délibérément), jusqu'à ses manifestations toujours plus "évoluées" au fur et à mesure qu'on prend en considération les peuples plus "civilisés" du monde ancien, en particulier au Proche-Orient (Égypte, Mésopotamie, Syro-Palestine: les cultures traditionnellement rapportées à l'Ancien Testament). En définitive, si l'on suit cette approche, le sacerdoce trouve son expression la plus accomplie dans le monde hébraïque qui, à son tour, représente l'antécédent direct de l'unique figure parfaite de prêtre (en tant que figure divine), celle de Jésus-Christ qui sert de modèle idéal à toute expérience postérieure.

Sur le plan méthodologique, il faut encore une fois remarquer que la phénoménologie religieuse fait bien sûr appel à la comparaison, mais exclusivement afin de déterminer ce qu'il y a de commun entre les diverses cultures qui puisse être rapporté à notre concept de sacerdoce. Au lieu de valoriser la dimension originale et spécifique des faits dans la réalité historique, on essaie d'atteindre une chimérique "quintessence" du sacerdoce dans les diverses civilisations, le plus petit commun dénominateur qui caractériserait toutes les expériences particulières: il en résulte un tableau abstrait et inexistant dans la réalité, qui ne nous apprend pas grand chose. De la sorte, on perd totalement et irrémédiablement de vue la signification humaine, historique des faits puisqu'on renonce à l'avance à contextualiser la recherche et à analyser les différences qui, seules, sont susceptibles de montrer la dimension de l'originalité.

Du point de vue opérationnel, par ailleurs, il est évidemment impossible de ne pas se fonder, dans ce type de recherche, sur l'expérience que nous avons du sacerdoce et la notion qui en découle. Il faut néanmoins être toujours conscient d'avoir affaire à une idée-guide, à un outil conceptuel de travail produit par nous-mêmes, et non pas à un paramètre absolu et éternellement valable. L'histoire des religions connaît du reste plusieurs cas analogues, parmi lesquels on rappellera la recherche qui porte sur la "magie" ou sur le mythe, que

l'on peut également mener en partant d'une définition conventionnelle à vérifier chaque fois sur le terrain. Sur un plan plus général, il s'agit ici de la dialectique entre ce que l'on appelle les points de vue “emic” et “etic,” une question bien connue en anthropologie et dans les sciences sociales, mais qui ne jouit malheureusement pas de la même popularité parmi les spécialistes de l'*Altertumswissenschaft* ou de l'Orientalisme.⁸

Dans le cas du sacerdoce, en particulier, on soulignera davantage que l'on a affaire à un terme et à un concept qui ne peuvent être utilisés sans une conscience historique et critique adéquate. Sur le plan opérationnel, l'on constate une oscillation entre des définitions très détaillées et ponctuelles du sacerdoce, impossibles à appliquer comme telles,⁹ et d'autres trop générales ou basées sur des critères subjectifs et approximatifs, comme p. ex. la typologie des spécialistes de la religion élaborée par Joachim Wach, avec les 10 classes fondées sur le charisme individuel.¹⁰ Willard G. Oxtoby a par ailleurs remarqué à juste titre que le mot “Priesthood,” comme d'autres termes/concepts de signification et d'étymologie occidentales, est souvent “pressed into service for the description of a range of phenomena worldwide.”¹¹ Si l'on emploie le terme “prêtre” dans un sens *cross-cultural*, en effet, “. . . a priest is any religious specialist acting ritually for or on behalf of a community. With a term used in so broad and flexible general sense, one excludes little from the category.”¹²

Oxtoby proposait aussi de fonder la définition du sacerdoce sur deux critères seulement: à savoir, la spécialisation au service d'une communauté/congrégation et l'activité sacrificielle: “When both of these

⁸ Cf. entre autres les différentes contributions (dues à Marvin Harris, Thomas N. Headland, James Lett, Kenneth L. Pike, et d'autres) dans Headland 1990 et aussi dans McCutcheon 1999.

⁹ Cf. le cas des 18 éléments qui caractériseraient le sacerdoce selon Honigsheim 1961.

¹⁰ Wach 1944:331ss. Voir dernièrement les remarques critiques de Rüpke 1996:241–245.

¹¹ Oxtoby 1987:529. Cf. aussi Neumann 1998.

¹² Oxtoby 1987:529.

factors are present, we have priesthood in a strict or narrow sense.”¹³ Cependant, en adoptant ces deux seuls paramètres, on rencontre de nombreuses difficultés pour identifier dans les autres cultures (même celles qui sont très proches de nous) des prêtres “à plein titre”. C’est le cas, p.ex., du monde juif et de certains courants protestants du Christianisme. Le sacerdoce hébraïque, comme chacun sait,¹⁴ était étroitement lié à l’activité sacrificielle qui ne se déroulait que dans un seul lieu sacré. La destruction du Temple eut pour conséquence la tendance à la disparition de cette institution, remplacée par une classe de “maîtres”, sages dépositaires de la tradition (rabbins), dépourvus de prérogatives sacerdotales *stricto sensu*. En milieu protestant, par ailleurs, le principe est largement répandu selon lequel chaque être humain peut revêtir la fonction sacerdotale et intercéder à titre personnel auprès de Dieu. Où trouve-t-on dans ce cas le rapport exclusif avec le sacré, le rôle *représentatif* vis-à-vis de la divinité, la fonction sacrificielle?

L’approximation conceptuelle peut diminuer considérablement si l’on essaie d’établir des paramètres d’analyse moins ambigus et des critères plus cohérents qui puissent orienter la recherche. Une voie prometteuse à suivre, entre autres, consiste à distinguer la *spécialisation professionnelle* de la *fonction culturelle*. La première, en particulier, doit être étudiée d’abord à l’intérieur des différents contextes historiques et culturels, en soumettant ensuite les résultats de la recherche à la comparaison historique. De ce dernier point de vue, on a pu constater que le processus de spécialisation professionnelle se réalise plus rapidement dans le domaine de la religion que dans d’autres domaines, sans doute à cause (entre autres) du haut degré d’“idéologisation” qui affecte les organisations religieuses.¹⁵ Jörg Rüpke a attiré à juste titre l’attention sur l’utilité heuristique d’analyser

¹³ *Ib.*, 528.

¹⁴ Cf. entre autres Cody 1969; Olyan 1985; Anderson 1991; Nurmela 1998.

¹⁵ Voir Rüpke 1996:257.

la figure du spécialiste de la religion comme agent de contrôle à l'intérieur de différents systèmes de symboles.¹⁶

Du point de vue comparatif, la double fonction médiatrice (et transformatrice) assumée parfois par les divers "prêtres," ou opérateurs/spécialistes culturels, est aussi particulièrement remarquable. Ils sont parfois les représentants des hommes auprès de la divinité (où, de toute façon, auprès d'un pouvoir extra- ou surhumain) et, en même temps, les représentants (ou parfois, les porte-paroles) de cette dernière auprès des mortels. De la sorte, l'opérateur culturel revêt un rôle dialectique entre le niveau humain et le niveau extra- ou surhumain en agissant au contact des deux, mais dans une sorte de troisième dimension, autonome et à deux voies.

À ce sujet, Jörg Rüpke encore a exprimé des réserves sur l'utilité de l'application du concept de "médiation" (redevable à la tradition chrétienne) dans les études sur les religions, qui devraient être analysées "only as systems of social actions or, paying more attention to the cognitive dimension, as systems of symbols."¹⁷ Il observe encore que "the suitable parameter in describing religious specialist cannot be the intensity of the relationship between the 'mediator' and a transcendental deity."¹⁸ Or, si l'intensité d'une relation homme/divinité (avec tous les problèmes dérivés) ne peut évidemment pas représenter un critère scientifique et si la perspective d'interprétation socio-symbolique indiquée par Rüpke dans son excellent article me semble digne de la plus grande attention, j'estime par contre que l'aspect de la "médiation" doit être également gardé comme un possible point de repère, surtout dans sa dimension fonctionnelle, exactement comme c'est sur le plan fonctionnel que se situe l'étude de l'action de contrôle exercée par les spécialistes religieux menée par Rüpke lui-même.

Un autre moyen pour étudier historiquement et morphologiquement cette figure dans les diverses religions consiste encore à l'évaluer par opposition fonctionnelle à d'autres figures. Dario Sabbatucci, entre

¹⁶ *Ib.*

¹⁷ *Ib.*, 246.

¹⁸ *Ib.*

autres, a particulièrement insisté sur l'opposition entre *sujet mythique* et *opérateur rituel*, en adoptant une perspective de recherche qui est sans aucun doute plus indépendante de la notion moderne fondée sur la dichotomie laïc/clérical (ou religieux).¹⁹ La réduction d'un phénomène complexe comme la fonction dite sacerdotale à une simple opposition entre *sphère mythique* et *sphère rituelle*²⁰ entraîne pourtant le danger d'une généralisation arbitraire qui risque de vider la recherche de son contenu, particulièrement dans les cas où la mythologie joue un rôle mineur ou bien n'existe carrément pas. Il est vrai, par ailleurs, que le "sacerdoce" apparaît comme et tend à devenir une institution dans les cas où il apparaît comme le développement historique des figures d'opérateurs rituels qui agissent dans des sociétés "pré-monarchiques", c'est-à-dire des sociétés qui ne connaissent pas (encore) la royauté (au sens général du terme). Au fur et à mesure qu'une société se hiérarchise, les spécialisations apparaissent, y compris celle de "prêtre" (toujours dans un sens conventionnel). L'on peut ajouter, en passant, qu'il ne s'agit pas toujours d'une classe improductive économiquement, comme on le lit souvent (une autre déformation historique dérivée de l'optique ethnocentrique). Quant à la royauté, l'histoire nous montre clairement que le souverain est en général (comme c'est souvent le cas au Proche-Orient ancien)²¹ l'opérateur rituel par excellence et les "prêtres" ne sont que des fonctionnaires délégués par le roi, détenteurs de pouvoirs et de fonctions diversifiées.

Il est de toute façon évident que les notions de "sacerdoce" et de "prêtre" restent ambiguës et soumises à des oscillations de sens, surtout si l'on dépend d'une définition trop rigide tirée de notre expérience culturelle. Étant donné que les prérogatives attribuées aux "prêtres" peuvent être concentrées dans une même personne ou bien partagées *de facto* entre plusieurs figures, il faut examiner pour chaque culture la terminologie adoptée et les fonctions particulières (le point

¹⁹ Sabbatucci 1987:141ss.: "Gli operatori rituali".

²⁰ Sans compter que dans ce cas aussi on emploie des termes tirés d'autres cultures et langues, avec tous les risques dont on vient de parler.

²¹ Cf. p. ex. Labat 1939; Engnell 1967.

de vue “emic”) exercées par les différents personnages qu’on peut rapprocher de notre prêtre. C’est ce que je me propose de faire ici, en exposant brièvement le cas de la religion syrienne à la fin du II^{ème} millénaire. Ce choix s’explique, entre autres, par le fait qu’il s’agit d’une aire culturelle parfois négligée par rapport, p. ex., à l’Égypte ou à la Mésopotamie,²² mais qui revêt néanmoins une importance particulière aussi bien en raison de ses coordonnées géographiques et chronologiques, que par l’influence qu’elle a exercé sur la tradition judéo-chrétienne à des époques postérieures.²³

Le cas spécifique que je soumetts à l’attention est celui d’Ugarit, afin de vérifier dans un rapide *case study* la présence de fonctions que l’on peut définir comme “sacerdotales,” leur nature, les manières dont ces fonctions sont concentrées et/ou partagées par des personnages particuliers.

Chacun sait que ce sont surtout les textes de Ras Shamra qui nous fournissent la plupart des informations sur la culture syrienne à la fin du Bronze Récent (XIV^e-XII^e siècles av. J.C.), en nous renseignant sur le panthéon, la mythologie, le système rituel, ainsi que sur la structure politique et socio-économique de ce petit royaume, qui peut être considéré comme emblématique de la situation de l’aire syro-palestinienne à cette époque.

On y trouve un panthéon polythéiste bien structuré, une société articulée avec au centre le roi, une économie dont le cœur est représenté par le palais royal et son organisation.²⁴ Il s’agit d’un véritable centre productif, aux niveaux stratégique et opérationnel, installé dans la ville, à côté duquel existent des communautés villageoises apparemment autonomes, mais de fait dépendantes de l’autorité centrale de

²² Cf. McEwan 1981, les études recueillis dans Quaegebeur 1993 et Watanabe 1999, ainsi que l’excellente analyse de Renger 1967–69.

²³ Un exemple—parmi les autres—particulièrement frappant de l’influence que les traditions syriennes ont eu sur le milieu judéo-chrétien pendant l’antiquité tardive est fourni par l’étude détaillée de la secte gnostique des Naassènes par Lancellotti 2000.

²⁴ Heltzer 1982.

presque tous les points de vue. En ce qui concerne les temples urbains et les sanctuaires ruraux, ils avaient vraisemblablement une certaine autonomie administrative (p. ex., le personnel avait le droit d'accepter les offrandes), mais ils restaient (spécialement les temples de la ville) rigoureusement intégrés dans l'organisation palatine qui leur fournissait la base de la subsistance et la plupart des "matières premières" pour exercer leur activité.

La première remarque à faire, sur ce point, une remarque peut-être évidente, c'est que le roi d'Ugarit était le centre et la source de tous les pouvoirs, y compris du pouvoir "religieux." Premier parmi les mortels, il était le représentant des hommes auprès des dieux, il intercédait pour le bien-être de ses sujets et pour la prospérité de son royaume. Sa position à l'intérieur du culte était primordiale. Le souverain participait comme acteur principal à la plupart des rites, dont un certain nombre se déroulait à l'intérieur même du palais royal et était célébré en l'honneur des dieux tutélaires de la dynastie. Sa participation n'était pas exclusivement passive, puisqu'il était souvent le protagoniste absolu des cérémonies et était, entre autres, soumis à des rites de "consécration" (*hl*) et de "désacralisation"²⁵ qui marquaient le passage du temps profane au temps "sacré". Les nombreux textes à caractère rituel qu'on possède²⁶ attestent sa présence dans presque toutes les cérémonies (au moins, les cérémonies publiques), tandis qu'ils ne mentionnent presque jamais des "prêtres" (*khn*) ou d'autres opérateurs cultuels dans le déroulement des rites.²⁷ Aussi la reine et les "fils du roi" (par ce terme l'on désigne aussi bien les enfants du souverain que les membres, au sens large, de la famille royale) participaient-ils au culte, surtout dans le cadre des rites dynastiques et de fertilité. *Last but not least*, le roi d'Ugarit était soumis à un processus de divinisa-

²⁵ Il s'agit bien sûr d'une traduction approximative.

²⁶ Xella 1981; Pardee 2000.

²⁷ Sur à peu près un centaine de documents qui concernent le culte, les "prêtres" ne sont mentionnés que dans un seul cas, précisément dans une conjuration pour neutraliser la morsure venimeuse des serpents (KTU 1.107:47, partiellement restitué).

tion²⁸ après sa mort et devenait de la sorte membre du groupe des Rapi-uma, les ancêtres puissants et bénéfiques qui présentent des analogies frappantes—sur le plan morphologique et fonctionnel—with les héros grecs.²⁹

Les textes mythologiques confirment par ailleurs cette situation. Les deux rois prototypiques qui y sont mentionnés, Kirta et Danilu,³⁰ sont également en étroit contact avec les dieux (en particulier Ilu et Baal) comme interlocuteurs aimés et privilégiés. Ils accomplissent des rites sacrificiels, divinatoires, des exorcismes, et président surtout au banquet sacrificiel appelé *dabhu*, auquel les dieux, les esprits des ancêtres et les hommes participent ensemble.³¹ Il s’agit d’une cérémonie d’importance fondamentale, dont la fonction (qui nous est révélée par les mythes) était de “faire descendre” les dieux du ciel en les attirant par le parfum des offrandes et de permettre par conséquent la célébration du repas communautaire et le contact entre les deux sphères.

Sans que l’on puisse parler de *sacral kingship* à proprement parler, on constate donc la centralité du roi d’Ugarit dans tous les aspects du culte.³² Il est en effet une sorte de “dieu mineur,” une qualité qui rend bien compte de sa présence débordante dans les rites, où le personnel du culte ne semble apparemment jouer aucun rôle. Il est néanmoins bien clair que le rôle du souverain était en même temps hautement symbolique et que, par conséquent, il déléguait la plupart de ses fonctions rituelles “opérationnelles” à divers personnages, des plus importants aux plus humbles, de la hiérarchie du royaume.

²⁸ L’on peut discuter sur l’emploi des mots, mais il est certain que le rang des souverains défunts dépassait largement celui des autres morts, il suffit de rappeler que les noms des dynastes était écrit avec le déterminatif divin.

²⁹ Merlo et Xella 2001.

³⁰ Ces deux personnages n’apparaissent pas explicitement comme rois d’Ugarit, mais il représentaient assurément des modèles idéals de souverains.

³¹ Le texte KTU 1.91 mentionne une longue série d’occasions rituelles où l’on prévoit la participation du roi, toutes caractérisées par l’emploi du vin.

³² Del Olmo 1993.

Il est indispensable de faire appel aux textes administratifs pour vérifier l'existence d'un personnel chargé du culte dans tous ses aspects, tandis que son articulation et ses tâches, vu le type de documents, doivent être prudemment déduites des informations laconiques qui nous sont parvenues. Ces textes ne nous renseignent que rarement, p. ex., sur leur spécialisation, en nous confinant souvent au niveau étymologique.

La documentation administrative et économique révèle qu'il existe une série de termes qui, directement ou indirectement, se rapportent à des opérateurs culturels. Sans vouloir anticiper ici mes conclusions, on peut néanmoins constater d'emblée qu'une distinction conventionnelle des devoirs et des fonctions n'est presque jamais possible.

Le terme sémitique classique pour prêtre, *khn* (ug. *khn*, à vocaliser *kāhinu*) est bien sûr attesté dans les textes d'Ugarit et il semble que cette charge fût dans une certaine mesure héréditaire. Les *khn*^m (dont on connaît aussi le correspondant akkadien, ^{lú}*sangū*^{meš}) constituaient une corporation ou groupe professionnel (un "collège" ou "famille" de prêtres, *dr khnm*, est attestée dans le texte KTU 4.375:24) qui, comme tous les autres, civils ou militaires (donc, tout à fait "laïcs," selon notre évaluation), faisait partie du personnel royal, les "gens du roi."³³ On a calculé qu'il y avait, dans la capitale du royaume d'Ugarit, à peu près une quarantaine de *khn*^m, sous la direction d'un "chef" (*rb khnm*), assurément nommé par le roi. Ce chef des prêtres était un des personnages les plus influents du royaume et son autorité n'était inférieure qu'à celle du roi et du "gouverneur du pays" (akkadien: *sākin mātī*), qu'il appelle "mon frère" (un chef des prêtres est défini "le *sukallu*, le surintendant des prêtres").

Un "chef des prêtres" dont le nom était Ḫurāṣanu était un personnage très important, dont la maison se trouvait sur l'acropole de la ville, entre les deux temples attribués aux dieux Baal et Dagan. On sait

³³ Ug. *bnš mlk*, akk. *ardē*^{meš} *šarri*. On leur attribuait rations alimentaires et champs à cultiver. Un texte indique aussi qu'ils étaient tenus à fournir des archers pour la garde royale.

qu’il était très riche, possédait d’autres biens immobiliers et avait reçu du roi la permission d’exploiter des terres.³⁴

On a la chance de connaître le nom et les titres d’un autre “chef des prêtres” d’Ugarit grâce aux colophons qui figurent au terme des mythes de Baal: c’est une indice précieux pour les renseignements qu’on peut en tirer. Il s’agit du célèbre scribe Ili-malku, élève d’un sage appelé Attenu, celui qui a transcrit la plupart des textes mythologiques de Ras Shamra. Voici la traduction de la version la plus longue et la plus complète du colophon (KTU 1.6 VI 54–58):

(54) Ili-malku, le Shubanite, a écrit, (55) disciple d’Attenu, le Devin,³⁵ chef (56) des “prêtres,” chef des “pasteurs”, (57) célébrant de Niqmaddu, roi d’Ugarit, (58) maître de Yargabu, seigneur de Tharmanu.

Même si les spécialistes ne s’accordent guère sur la traduction de plusieurs mots, et en particulier sur l’attribution des titres à Attenu ou à Ili-malku, le sens général est clair. Personnellement, j’interprète le texte dans le sens qu’Attenu était seulement le maître d’Ili-malku qui, à son tour, n’était pas seulement l’autorité suprême en matière de tradition mythologique—c’est-à-dire, le scribe auteur de la rédaction des textes mythologiques les plus significatifs du “cycle de Baal”—mais aussi un devin et le titulaire des autres charges mentionnées par le texte. Il était vraisemblablement “chef des prêtres” et “chef des pasteurs” et avait aussi la fonction de “célébrant” (terme qui traduit l’ugar. *ṯy*), sur laquelle je vais revenir tout de suite.

En ce qui concerne le titre de “chef des pasteurs” (*rb nqdm*, akk. *nâqidu*), il doit s’agir d’un groupe professionnel comme beaucoup d’autres (les *nqdm* appartiennent, comme les *khn*, au personnel royal): les documents administratifs ne donnent pas l’impression que l’on a affaire à une corporation religieuse. La question est pourtant plus compliquée qu’il n’y paraît, puisqu’on connaît un autre terme pour “pasteur,” c’est-à-dire *r’y* (**rê’u*) et la distinction entre ce dernier et le

³⁴ Lipinski 1988:126–131.

³⁵ Sur cette traduction du mot *prln* (hourrite *pu-ru-lu-ni*) qui correspond à 𐤒𐤏𐤋 et à *barû* dans les listes lexicales, cf. van Soldt 1989.

nqd n'est pas aisée. S'agissant, dans notre colophon, d'un titre attribué à quelqu'un qui est en même temps "chef des prêtres," un soupçon subsiste que *nqd* puisse (aussi) être une désignation religieuse, à peu près semblable à celle de "pasteur" employée pour désigner le pape, les évêques, etc. Il n'est pas exclu, par ailleurs, que les *nqdm* fussent responsables des troupeaux et, comme tels, les contrôleurs des "vrais" pasteurs.³⁶

Le texte qui nous intéresse attribue encore au scribe Ili-malku le titre de *ṭy*, un terme traduit ici par "célébrant," dont la signification précise a été tirée au clair par Donna F. Freilich. La savante américaine a montré, d'une manière tout à fait convaincante, que le *ṭy* était "(...) a religious official who answered directly to the king, and was associated with him in the performance of certain rites. The *ṭy* was a man of high degree who could hold other religious offices as well, such as *prln*, *rb khnm*, and *rb nqdm*. In the case of Ili-malku he was also an accomplished scribe."³⁷ L'on ajoutera qu'une des fonctions du *ṭy* est bien illustrée par un texte d'exorcisme (KTU 1.169), où ce terme désigne précisément le célébrant chargé d'expulser les "mauvais esprits" du corps du malade.

Si l'on considère toutes ces données, il est évident que la personne d'Ili-malku était dépositaire d'un pouvoir considérable et qu'il exerçait une activité de contrôle sur le reste du personnel et sur l'activité religieuse. Son activité médiatrice est clairement attestée par le rapport entre le roi et les sujets, d'une part, et la fonction de *ṭy* qui opère en contact avec les dieux à faveur des fidèles.

Un autre devin dont l'identité est connue porte le nom d'Agaptharri: il vivait dans une maison située au sud de l'acropole. Sa résidence abritait une bibliothèque spécialisée, où l'on a mis au jour plusieurs textes inscrits sur des modèles de foie et de poumon. Pour lui aussi,

³⁶ Lipinski 1988:132. Le temple aurait été intéressé directement car les pasteurs devaient lui fournir les ovins pour l'alimentation et les sacrifices, en plus d'autres produits de leur activité.

³⁷ Freilich 1992:25, aussi pour le problème de la correspondance entre *ṭy* et SUKKAL (cf. aussi van Soldt 1989).

il existe divers indices qui parlent en faveur de son haut rang et de sa puissance économique.³⁸

D’autres personnes de la société ugaritique doivent encore retenir notre attention, qui peuvent tous se rattacher plus ou moins directement à la sphère du culte et à l’activité religieuse en général. Il s’agit en particulier des *qdšm*, mot dérivé de la racine **qdš* qui renvoie au “sacré”³⁹ en plusieurs langues sémitiques. Exactement comme les *khn*, la catégorie des *qdšm* était une corporation à l’intérieur du personnel royal dont la fonction se transmettait probablement de père en fils. En dépit de son étymologie et de certaines acceptions particulières (Mésopotamie, Israël), ce terme, à Ugarit, ne désigne par spécialement des “prostitué(e)s sacré(e)s,” mais une fonction religieuse qu’on n’est pas en mesure de préciser (les indices d’une correspondance avec le devin mésopotamien appelé *barû* sont assez faibles).

Pour conclure, il faut encore rapidement rappeler d’autres termes qui sont susceptibles de retenir notre attention dans le cadre de cette enquête, comme le *mlhš*, un “charmeur” de serpents (mentionné dans l’enchantement KTU 1.100), le “chanteur” (*šr*, akk. ^{lu}*nāru*), le “purificateur” (*mḥll*), le *trmn* (désignation possible du participant au repas cultuel), sans compter d’autres catégories de personnel plus humbles, comme le “joueur de cymbale” (*mšl*), l’“approvisionnement d’eau du sanctuaire” (*šib mqdšt*), les esclaves attachés aux temples, et d’autres encore plus difficiles à identifier avec précision,⁴⁰ sans oublier enfin le *rb mrzḥ* qui était vraisemblablement une charge honorifique assignée à celui qui présidait les réunions de l’association religieuse appelée précisément *mrzḥ*, centrée sur les repas communautaires, la consommation rituelle du vin et le culte des morts.⁴¹

Tout bien pesé, le tableau qui ressort de cet exposé ne permet pas de repérer, dans la documentation syrienne antique, des coordonnées de classement qui correspondent précisément à nos notions de “prêtre” et

³⁸ Lipinski 1988:137.

³⁹ Cf. Xella 1982.

⁴⁰ *rb*, *ḥdrḡl*, etc. Cf. en général Heltzer 1982:131ss.

⁴¹ Voir en dernier lieu McLaughlin 1991.

de “sacerdoce.” Vue l’inexistence—guère surprenante du reste—d’une distinction indigène entre la sphère de la religion et d’autres domaines (une recherche qui reste à faire), il en résulte que les pouvoirs et les fonctions de cette “typologie” sont répartis selon une optique originale, qui suit ses propres critères et qu’on est bien loin de comprendre dans toute sa complexité.

Une fois de plus, les données concernant une civilisation différente de la nôtre, peu importe si celle-ci est ancienne ou moderne—mais dans ce cas très proche de nous, elle se trouve être méditerranéenne et à peine antérieure au monde hébraïque—ne se laissent pas réduire à notre définition, réaffirmant vigoureusement l’originalité de cette (chaque) expérience culturelle.

Ceci dit, rien n’empêche bien sûr d’y déceler des aspects et des tendances inspiratrices, susceptibles de contribuer à une étude d’ensemble d’un phénomène dont la “définition” ne doit nous servir que comme orientation générale. Toute autre approche qui ignore les dangers de l’ethnocentrisme et des a priori idéologiques—il faut en être toujours bien conscient—ne serait qu’une violence exercée sur l’histoire et, comme telle, dépourvue de toute signification pour l’étude scientifique des religions.

Si, en 1843, Benjamin Winchester pouvait encore se permettre d’écrire un livre intitulé *A history of the priesthood from the beginning of the world to the present time* et, il y a à peine 30 ans, James A. Mohler se mettait encore à rechercher *The origin and evolution of the priesthood*, l’historien des religions d’aujourd’hui ne doit jamais manquer d’être vigilant et céder aux tentations anti-réductionnistes qui, comme des sirènes au chant fascinant, se proposent sans cesse derrière le masque de l’exigence d’un dialogue inter-disciplinaire et d’idéaux œcuméniques.⁴²

Les religions du monde antique, par conséquent, parfois oubliées aujourd’hui au profit des mouvements religieux actuels et des enquêtes

⁴² Voir les remarques assez polémiques mais fondamentalement justes de Fitzgerald 1997 sur l’“ideological construction” dans les études sur la/les religion/s.

d'anthropologie religieuse menées sur le terrain, sont aussi susceptibles d'offrir un domaine de recherche fécond pour les historiens des religions. L'étude des religions antiques suppose l'utilisation d'une approche qui ne peut coïncider *sic et simpliciter* avec celle des spécialistes des religions encore analysables directement et montre, en tout cas, que, grâce à l'utilisation d'une méthode historiquement fondée, soutenue par la "bonne" philologie dont parlait Kurt Rudolph⁴³ et en étant toujours attentive aux pièges de l'éternelle dialectique *insider/outsider*, l'obtention de résultats nouveaux et scientifiquement valables dans ce domaine n'est pas une chimère.

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⁴³ Rudolph 1985:28 (c'est une philologie au sens large du mot, un mot utilisé "to denote the scholarly investigation on a people's culture" d'après ses sources).

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THE VIRTUOSIC EXEGESIS OF THE BRAHMAVADIN AND THE RABBI

TIMOTHY LUBIN

Summary

Despite the vast spatial and theological gulfs separating the Rabbinic and Brahmanic communities, their respective intellectual projects have a number of analogous features. My discussion will (1) outline for each tradition a set of interpretive strategies, showing how these two sets are strikingly similar in approach and logic. Then I will (2) propose that these resemblances are not entirely coincidental. They largely stem from a similar view of the object of study—Torah and the biblical text for the Rabbis, the sacrifice and its verbal articulation for the Brahmins—as eternal, not of human authorship, perfect in form, rich in hidden meanings, the criterion of right action and true knowledge. The exegete aims to fully internalize the sacred word, to perceive the world through it, and to uncover what is hidden in it. This much of my analysis might also be applicable to other traditions that regard themselves as possessing revelation, but (3) I argue that there are further parallels here in the direction these traditions carried their interpretive enterprise. In each tradition, the interpreters continued to build an edifice of ritual knowledge and interpretation even as the central rites were eclipsed by other forms of piety: whether because the cult became inaccessible (in the Diaspora) or unperformable (when the Temple was destroyed), or because it lost patronage (as appears to have happened in India). In tandem with the shift away from priestly sacrifice, each tradition promotes the ideal of study for its own sake, and the transfer of priestly functions to the learned householder.

I. The Aim and Parameters of the Comparison

This essay attempts a type of comparison which is still considered daring.¹ J.Z. Smith warns us that comparison should address a “total

¹ This despite the precedents lately set by Barbara Holdrege (1996) and the scholarship collected in Goodman 1994. The research for this paper was supported by funds provided by the American Institute of Indian Studies and the National Endowment for the Humanities, for which I am grateful. A brief version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in

ensemble” and not just “isolated motifs” lest we succumb to “parallelo-mania.” The model he offers for this sort of comparison—namely his own work—is “a comparative enterprise within closely adjacent historical, cultural or linguistics units” (the religions of Late Antiquity).² Here, I will compare Rabbinic Judaism and late-Vedic Brahmanism, traditions at great geographic, cultural, and theological distance from each other. Despite this disparity, I would justify the undertaking by noting that it is not just an assortment of contextless phenomena that is being compared, but two instances of a complex hermeneutics viewed as it develops within their respective *historical processes*. Thus, this essay not only outlines two similar approaches to exegesis, but sees them following analogous *trajectories* within their contexts.³ Thus, although I focus mainly on exegetical approaches, the validity of the comparison depends on a much broader set of similar circumstances. Both traditions (a) are founded on the traditions of ritual sacrifice (b) shaped by a hereditary priestly elite; each (c) possesses a body of texts, composed and compiled over a long period, (d) that come to be regarded as divine in origin, and that (e) are partly concerned with ritual matters (this concern predominates in brahmana and *Talmud*, but midrash literature devotes vast space to the exposition of non-legal scriptural topics as well). In both cases, (f) these texts (or other data treated analogously) are subjected to a complex form of patterned exegesis, (g) much of which comes to be classified as revelation as well (viz., Oral Torah, *śruti*). Finally, (h) the activity of exegesis and text-study becomes in itself an important form of piety (i) with its own ritual formats, and (j) when the centrality of the sacrificial cult is called into question due to social and political changes (as in India during the Ganges urbanization of the 6th–4th c. BCE, and in Hellenistic Judea and Roman Palestine)

November 1999. I have benefited greatly from the comments of the panel organizer, Barbara Holdrege, of other members of the panel, Laurie Patton, Michael Berger, and Francis X. Clooney, S.J., and of my colleague Richard Marks.

² In his preface to *Map Is Not Territory* (1978), ix.

³ Here, with Smith 1978:xi, I use Robinson and Koester’s (1971) term.

or is fully destroyed (with the destruction of the second Temple), this interpretive tradition provides a basis for refocusing the tradition.

This abstract set of parallels conceals innumerable differences large and small, but should nevertheless show an adequate basis for making a close comparison of just what sorts of interpretive techniques were developed and the direction in which they were applied. My aim here is to sketch the outlines of a typology of hermeneutic principles, and to observe that they were applied in broadly similar ways under broadly comparable circumstances in the two traditions.⁴ Since I do not know Hebrew, I will be relying on published translations and on several excellent analyses of the structure and development of Rabbinic interpretation. My main contribution will be in correlating the Judaic material with the Brahmanical sources, which I have studied in some depth.⁵ So after making some preliminary observations about these traditions' attitudes to knowledge and text (part I), I will sketch out a typology of rhetorical devices shared by them (part II), and then

⁴ The comparison is compromised somewhat by the fact that we know very little about how the Ganges valley urbanization directly affected the Vedic cult. On the one hand, it is clear that it emerged in an increasingly sedentary pastoralist society turned farmer-herders, whereas the renunciant movements that arose during the period of urbanization began in the new city-states of Magadha in the east. If, as it seems, political and economic power shifted from the village-based clan warlords to the urban kings, it is likely that the traditional, hereditary relations of patronage and ritual office between the chiefs and brahmin priests were disrupted, and a new set of powers offered patronage to the new charismatic holy men preaching in and around the new trading centers. This is the picture suggested by Erdosy (1988; and Erdosy in Allchin 1995). Yet the Brahmanical sources give no clear indications of such a rivalry, although it appears, for instance, in the early (yet not contemporary) Buddhist sources. So, although some change is likely to have taken place in that period, it is not clear how dramatic or disruptive the decline of patronage for the priestly Vedic cult really was. A greater motivation for change may simply have been a desire to accommodate within Brahmanism a wider range of potential patrons by encouraging participation in Vedic practice through Veda-study and home-based ritual observance.

⁵ The Indic sources are less well known, and tend to present greater linguistic problems (or anyway there is less consensus about their meaning), which justifies my including more of the original wording.

identify the parallel vectors along which these strategies came to be deployed as social and political pressures transformed the special role of the priestly cult, which had become a central subject of reflection in the traditions (part III).

To compare exegetical techniques, we must first ascertain what those are in each case. On the Judaic side, I am thinking mainly of the midrash, or “investigation [of scripture].” This in itself is a very broad category; Shaye Cohen has deemed it so “slippery and vague” that he prefers to use English terms to denote particular kinds of interpretation.⁶ Yet one of those terms, exegesis, seems hardly less broad. Midrash is exegesis, but it is a very particular sort. Cohen offers an irreverent definition: midrash is intentional misinterpretation. While from the standpoint of literal or “obvious” reading (*peshat*) the midrash often represents a surprising departure, the process is not quite so arbitrary as Cohen makes it sound here. No doubt the rabbi had considerable latitude in his reading; yet the activity of *derash* (the search for the inner meaning of scripture) as practised by the Sages came to follow a discrete set of principles. These have been explained in more than one way.

David Weiss Halivni has argued that *derash* is the earliest and defining form of interpretation in Judaism. For him, it reflects the Judaic preference for “justified law” rather than apodictic law—that is to say, the Jews wanted to know the reasons and motives behind God’s commands. This concern he traces back to the Torah itself, where it appears in the frequency of “motive clauses” (“for [*ki*] . . .,” “that [*lema’an*] . . .,” “lest [*pen*] . . .,” “therefore [*al ken*] . . .”). Likewise, Michael Fishbane has shown that the roots of Rabbinic interpretation also are found in the Bible.⁷ For example, Jacob’s name is explained in Gen. 25.26 and 27.36 on the basis of a “lexical affinity” (see below): “And his hand had taken hold of Esau’s heel (*ʿaqev*); so they named him Jacob (Yaʿaqov),” and “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me (*wayyaʿqevni*) these two times.”

⁶ Cohen 1987:205, cf. 204–213.

⁷ Fishbane 1985, 1989.

The long period during which interpretation was transmitted orally was, in Halivni's reckoning, a period of halakhic midrash, that is, legal interpretation that appealed explicitly to scripture for support. He sees the *Mishnah*, a compilation by the *tannaim* of legal rulings propounded without reference to scripture and arranged by topic, as an aberration arising from an impulse to codify Jewish ritual practice following the destruction of the second Temple, and the dislocations of the Bar Kochba rebellion and its suppression. Midrashic exegesis returns with arguments of the *amoraim*, embodied in the two *Talmuds*, and the aggadic midrash collections. Thus, Rabbinic interpretation is oriented primarily to the Biblical text. The *Midrash Rabbah* follows the textual order, while the *Talmud*, as a commentary of the *Mishnah*, is organized by subject.

Such a distinction is absent in the earliest Vedic exegesis as represented in the genre designated *brāhmaṇa*, 'that which relates to sacred utterance,' in that the Vedic "scriptures" came into being precisely as liturgical compilations, and, in the case of the Yajur Veda collections in particular, followed the order of rites in the Vedic system of worship (*yajña*). The brahmana genre could thus be defined by a medieval commentator as "an explanation of a ritual act and of the mantras belonging to it."⁸ For the *brahmavādin* (expounder of sacred texts), the Vedic mantras were the aural manifestation of the ritual of worship, a point of orientation for pious action. The first principle is *yajña* (ritual worship), the means by which the gods are frequently said to have won their place in heaven, and *yajña* is often the primary object of interpretation: the words of the Veda are a mirror thereof. This is one source of incongruity between the two traditions. Where the rabbis of the *Talmud* always address themselves to a canon of texts (to attain a deeper understanding that can allow the Jew to fulfill his part of the covenant), the early brahmavadins examine the ritual utterances and actions directly, texts being just the audible hypostasis of the enacted primordial mystery. (However, in later centuries, as the practice of most forms of

⁸ Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara *ad Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 1.5.1; Gonda 1975:340.

Vedic ritual ceased, and the emphasis fell on recitation and commentary, the Veda was increasingly treated primarily as a text.)

Because of this ritual focus, brahmana in effect serves the combined aims of the *Mishnah* with its accompanying gemara: the later codes distinguish two components in brahmana: the ritual injunction (*vidhi* or *karma-vidhāna*) and its exegesis (*arthavāda*, ‘discussion of meaning or purpose’).⁹ The exegesis in fact contains much “aggadic” lore not related directly to the ritual, but the other application of midrash, as commentary to revealed scripture following the textual order, is not preserved in India until a much later period, in the medieval commentaries to the Vedic texts (including the works called *Brāhmaṇas*). This is not to say that such commentary was not made orally at a much earlier time. Indeed, the extant works of Vedic interpretation, as of midrash, are simply preserved examples of the sorts of explications that the sages had long offered orally in their teaching.

Despite these differences, there is a clear analogy between interpretive approaches in Rabbinic and Brahmanic literature. The later course of the traditions offers some interesting parallels as well. Halivni dubs the post-talmudic period (after the 6th c.) a “period of harmonization.”¹⁰ By this time *Talmud* had become the primary point of reference and object of interpretation as far as Halakhah was concerned, so the *Talmud* is treated on a par with the (Written) Torah. In India too, a period of “harmonization” begins with the promulgation of the Dharma literature, which in this case means the collapsing of the distinctive opinions of the different Vedic lineages into an eclectic but single prescription.

In later periods, there is also an increasing preference for *peshat* (literal interpretation) in biblical interpretation.¹¹ In the Brahmanical tradition of interpreting the Vedic ritual, the teachers of the *Mīmāṃsā*

⁹ E.g., *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* 24.1.32ff.

¹⁰ Halivni 1991:39.

¹¹ Halivni (1991:34) discerns the “period of the awareness of the value of *peshat*” (10th to 13th centuries) and the “period of the uncompromisability of *peshat*” (after the 18th century). On the other hand, Kabbalistic exegesis is a revival of *derash*.

also devalued the *arthavāda* (the discovery of “indirect meanings”) in the brahmana literature, insisting on the primacy of the ritual injunction, literally understood. The medieval commentators on the Vedic corpora also tended toward a simple glossing that was meant to show the direct meaning of the text.

II. Basic Techniques

Derash and Arthavāda

The rabbi and the brahmavadin made very similar assumptions about the nature of their tasks. In each case, they presumed that their object of study (respectively, Torah and *yajña* or Veda) was a timeless fact of heavenly origin, pregnant with meanings hidden from view. “The gods love what is hidden,” we are repeatedly told.¹² The master exegete has the special capacity to uncover this treasure of wisdom by identifying the clues provided in the outer forms of the revelation. The highest *brahma-vidyā* (divine wisdom) has the meters of the Vedic verses and elements of the ritual as its bodies (*tanū*); the oral Torah (in its broadest sense, the sages’ exegeses) is embedded in the written Torah, which needs only to be read in the proper way to sound the vast depths of meaning. But what is the proper way? Clearly, it is not equally accessible to all. Rabbinic and priestly Brahmanical hermeneutics was an enterprise of developing and applying formal techniques for interpreting the Torah and the *yajña*/Veda effectively.

Halivni’s periodization of biblical exegesis begins with the “period of reading in” (up to ca. 200 CE), in which the “plain meaning” of the biblical text was “displaced” by a less obvious meaning. “Reading in” is the term Halivni uses for instances in which the base text is actually modified (typical of tannaitic derashah). The second phase is the “period of textual implication” (3rd to 6th c.); over this period, more and more complex readings were put forward, always finding a basis in the scriptural text; any superfluous word or grammatical irregularity could provide the clue. The signals of implied meaning were instances

¹² Gonda (1975:378) cites numerous instances.

of seeming verbal superfluity or peculiarity of form: words in a base text that seemed, according to their literal sense to be redundant or unusually phrased were taken to indicate some further point (typical of amoraic, and especially what Halivni dubs “stammaitic,” *derashah*).

Brahmanical interpretation begins with the brahmana literature, which combines the *Mishnah*’s focus on ritual with the full-fledged exegetical approach of midrash, including much aggadic material, so to speak. A second phase of interpretation comes in the codification of the rituals in the sutras.

A. Hermeneutic Juxtaposition

i. Juxtaposing Textual Passages

The most common and important exegetical device in the Rabbinic tradition is the technique of juxtaposing biblical passages (and other texts) utterly out of their original context as a means of throwing light on the topic at hand. While these juxtapositions often seem surprising to the newcomer to midrash, the principle is quite sophisticated. The adduced text is deemed relevant usually on account of some detail that rises to importance only in the new, exegetical context. Thus the adduced verse as a whole is not necessarily a gloss of the topic-idea; often it is simply a scriptural vehicle for that portion that is made relevant to the topic, and is used to carry forward the interpretive argument. The *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, a fifth-century collection of Sabbath and festival homilies, represents a particularly elegant and elaborate use of this technique.

Rabbinic authorities themselves regarded this as the definitive approach of midrash, and identified a number of different principles governing the use of one passage to illumine another: a list of seven is attributed to Hillel (ca. 1st c. BCE); R. Ishmael’s authoritative list has thirteen; and R. Eliezer, son of Yose the Galilean identifies thirty-two different rules. Thus, for instance, adduced texts were deemed relevant to the text in question because they allowed an *a fortiori* inference, an inference by analogy (*gezerah shawah*, ‘equal decision’), a specification of a general idea, or the provision of a broader scriptural context for the text in question. An example:

Then the LORD said to Moses, *Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward* (Ex. 14:15 [through the Red Sea]) . . . R. Meir says, “[Said the Holy One,] ‘If I created dry land for the sake of primal Adam, who was only one man, as it is said “God said, Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear” [Gen. 1:9], will I not make the sea into dry land for the sake of this holy congregation?!’ ” (*Mekhilta Beshallah* 4, I 216)

The adducing of passages from other parts of the canon is much less common in the earlier brahmana-literature, or at least in that part directly devoted to expounding individual rites. In the latter works, the mantras of the rite in question are explained without connecting them with others. In the *Āraṇyakas* and early *Upaniṣads*, which are a later development of the brahmana genre, and which address esoteric themes, Vedic verses begin to be introduced in this fashion, although much less systematically than in midrash. *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, for instance, does this frequently. In a discussion of the mysterious powers of the meters in the Mahaduktha litany, the brahnavadin states:

This [Mahaduktha litany] is produced as a thousand *br̥hatī*-verses. Some recognize a thousand of various meters . . . , some say a thousand *triṣṭubhs*, some a thousand *jagatīs*, some a thousand *anuṣṭubhs*. A Sage says, *Sages in their wisdom discovered Indra dancing to an anuṣṭubh* (*Ṛg Veda* 10.124.9). That means that they discovered in speech the breath of Indra. . . . A Sage says (*RV* 8.76.12): *A speech of eight feet*—for [the *anuṣṭubh* meter has] eight feet of four syllables—*of nine corners*—for the *br̥hatī* meter becomes nine-cornered [by adding a ninth foot]—*touching the truth*—for speech united with verse is truth—I have made as a body, out of Indra, for from these thousand *br̥hatīs* made into *anuṣṭubhs*, which is Indra’s breath, he makes speech . . . as a body. (*Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.3.5-6; adapted from Keith’s translation)

The adduced verses, drawn from disparate parts of the canon, are employed to show how Indra’s vital energy is present in certain meters, and how these are used by the worshiper to make a body of divine speech for himself. I shall give another excellent example of this technique below (*Āśvalāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra* 1.1.4-5).

ii. Juxtaposing Ritual and Cosmic Elements to Identify ‘Linkages’
(*bandhu*)

There is another type of hermeneutic juxtaposition that is distinctive of the Brahmanical tradition: declaring hidden linkages (*bandhu*). Given the Rabbinic tradition’s unwavering focus on the text of the written Torah, and the presumption that Torah is a map of the universe,¹³ it is natural that hermeneutic juxtaposition should involve text-places on that map. Midrash identifies the criss-crossing highways (and back roads) between them. In the brahmana form of exegesis, the Vedic texts are only occasionally juxtaposed; it is rather the diverse loci of ritual universe itself that are to be associated. I think it is justified to consider this a form of interpretation, because, as I pointed out earlier, the ritual itself *is* the primary text for the brahmavadins; the words, which we consider the text, are simply a verbal shadow of the ideal worship-ritual. The web of associations that the brahmavadin weaves—at first glance chaotic and arbitrary, but when viewed as a gestalt remarkably consistent—reflects the divine order of the universe, as mapped in the ritual system.¹⁴

In form, these juxtapositions are simply identifications of one thing (the subject of discussion) with another (its mystical equivalent on another plane). These statements usually take the form “Y *vaí* X” (“X indeed is Y”) in which X is the subject and Y is the predicate,¹⁵ or “X [*hí*] Y” (“[For] X is Y”):

The sacrificial post is yonder sun, the altar the earth, the grass-seat the plants, the kindling wood the trees, the aspersing-waters the water, the enclosing sticks the [four] directions. (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 5.28)

But the correlations can be extended until they become an extended metaphor. Thus, the ubiquitous observation, “Prajāpati is the year,”

¹³ Recall *Genesis Rabbah* 1.1, quoted above.

¹⁴ Brian K. Smith 1994 presents a thorough discussion of these patterns.

¹⁵ Note the inverted order; the emphatic particle *vaí* in such nominal sentences generally follows the fronted predicate. This pattern has not been noted, and translators have often misrepresented such sentences by taking the predicate as the subject.

eventually may be seen to assert that Prajāpati's world-creating dismemberment gave rise to the divisions of the year, and that the regular round of worship rites knits together the "joints of the year," and thus puts Humpty-Dumpty together again. Likewise, the vessel of the *pravargya* offering is the "head of the worship-rite," which can be expanded to mean: "When one places the *pravargya*-vessel on the fire, one puts back the head of the worship-rite" (*yāt pravargyāṃ pravṛṇākti | yajñāśyaivā tāc chīraḥ prāti dadhāti*, *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 5.1.7).

These linkages may also be presented in the language of analogy. Thus, when the worshiper sits on two antelope skins that have been stitched together back to back around the edges, he presides over heaven and earth, for "these two worlds are joined at the edges, so to speak (*iva*)."¹⁶ By stitching them together, heaven and earth are made to couple. Even if there is only one skin, it represents the whole universe: the white hairs are heaven, the black are earth (or vice versa!), and the brown are the midspace (*Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.2.1.1-4). The identifications may overlap, but they are not mutually exclusive.¹⁶

It should be noted that a similar assertion of linkages can be found in the Rabbinic tradition, especially in later mystical texts:

The commandments of the whole Torah are joints and limbs in the celestial mystery. And when they are all joined together they all . . . reflect the mystery of man, male and female. (*Zohar* 2.162b; cf. *Leviticus Rabbah* 1.8, §D below)

B. Non-literal Gloss

Most of the techniques I describe below must be included as forms of paraphrase. In its simplest form, a topic—whether a piece of text, an act, or an idea—is restated in different terms so as to bring out a meaning that was not evident in its original form. This restatement may involve changing one word, or simply adding words, or introducing a completely different statement that is equated with the original one.

And he shall then remain his slave for life (Ex. 21:6). [That is,] Until the Jubilee year. . . . [If] money, which has the power to acquire anything, can acquire a slave for no more than six years, then piercing, which acquires nothing but slaves,

¹⁶ On *bandhu*, see Oldenberg 1919, Gonda 1965, Oguibénine 1983 = 1998.

should not have the power to acquire the slave for more than six years! What then is the meaning of *for life*? Until the Jubilee year. (*Mekhilta Nizikin* 2, III 17; Hammer 1995:404)

This technique occurs also in brahmana. During the consecration for worship, the sacrificer squats behind the skins, and touches them where the white and black hairs meet, addressing them with mantras, which the brahmana here explains (the mantras themselves are in italics):

You [the skins] are ornaments (śilpa). An ornament is a counterpart, so he really says: You are the counterparts (prátirūpa) of the ṛcs and the sāmāns. . . . When he says: I grasp you, he really says: I enter into you [since the dīkṣita enters as an embryo into the sacrifice]. He says: May they protect me up to the outcome of this worship, by which he really says: Let them care of me (gopāya-) up to the end of this worship. (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.2.1.5, 7)¹⁷

Here we see one of the Śatapatha's characteristic exegetical techniques: the translation of "obscure" mantras into unambiguous, plain language, so as to reveal the actual intentions of the participants.

C. Lexical Affinity

In both midrash and brahmana, the interpreter frequently explains a datum by pointing out a "lexical affinity," that is, a significant similarity between a word in the datum and some other term or phrase drawn often from a completely different context.

In the Judaic context, Kugel (1986) describes how midrash follows the pattern of a joke in its form. The rabbis assumed that scripture contains, besides the plain sense of the words, innumerable hidden meanings that are true in the sense of being set there intentionally by God and that must be "sought out" or "discovered" by means of particular techniques. These techniques include word-plays, etymologies, and variant readings, and the adducing of anecdotes and legends. The force

¹⁷ śilpe stha iti yád vái prátirūpaṃ tác chīlpam ṛcām ca sāmānām ca prátirūpe stha ity evetād āha . . . sá yád āha té vām ārabha iti té vām práviśāmīty evetād āha té mā pātām āsyá yajñásyodṛca iti té mā gopāyatam āsyá yajñásya saṁsthāyā ity evetād āha.

of the midrash depends on the explicative “punch line.” For the Jewish authors, the “joke is the dissonance between the religion of the Rabbi and the Book from which it is supposed to be derived—and . . . more precisely the dissonance between that book’s supposedly unitary and harmonious message and its actually fragmentary and inconsistent components.”¹⁸ In response to the troubling particularity of scriptural passages, the midrash addresses the single verse with no reference to the context of the passage or book. This “principle of insularity” is scarcely ever violated, for it provides the opportunity to uncover obscure meaning and connections with other pieces of scripture far removed from the one at hand. For example:

R. Hoshaiiah opened: *Then I was beside Him as an ’āmôn [nursling], and I was His delight day after day* [Prov. 8:30]. . . . [An] ’āmôn is an artisan (’ûmôn). The Torah declares, I was the working instrument (*kelî*) of the Holy One, blessed be He. In the normal course of affairs, when a mortal king builds a palace he does not build it by his own skill but by the skill of an architect. Moreover, he does not build it out of his own head but makes use of plans and tablets in order to know how to make the rooms and the doors. Thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world.¹⁹ (*Genesis Rabbah* 1.1; cf. *Zohar* 2.161a)

A similar principle appears in brahmana: a key word in the datum is simply juxtaposed with another word. Thus, during the rite of consecrating a soma-sacrificer, the worshiper places his right knee on the deerskin, saying, “You are a refuge, give me refuge.” The *Śatapatha* explains: “The hide (*cārman*) of the black deer—that is its human (aspect); among the gods it is a refuge (*śārman*)” (3.2.1.8). Here again the dichotomy between the divine and the human results in a hidden nature being attributed to a seemingly ordinary object. A skin becomes a means of protection once its divine significance is recognized. The purpose of the brahmana is to bring about this recognition.

¹⁸ Kugel 1986:80.

¹⁹ As quoted in Holdrege 1996:164.

Similarly, a verbal affinity (in this case, between etymologically related words) provides the justification for fasting before offering worship to the gods:

Now then of eating and not eating. Āṣāḍha Sāvayasa was of the opinion that the regimen consists in not eating. For the gods see right through the mind of a man; they know that he enters on this regimen. Thinking, “he will sacrifice to us in the morning,” all the gods come to his house. They visit (*upa-vas-*) in his house; this is the fasting-day (*upavasathā*). (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.1.7-8)

The technical term *upa-vas-* (‘to fast’) literally means ‘to dwell with; visit’. When the gods perceive the sacrificer’s *vratā*—the intention to worship, manifest in the rule he undertakes to follow—they come to stay with him in his home, knowing they will be fed as guests. On account of this, the sacrificer should forebear to eat before his divine guests have been offered their meal, lest he violate the code of ritual hospitality. Here the play is simply on two meanings of the same prefixed verbal root, whereas in the previous example, the juxtaposed words were phonologically similar, but unrelated linguistically.

D. Hermeneutic Etymology

These examples suggest that the exegetes see an implicit connection between similar words that indicates the significant relationship between the ideas or things denoted by the words. This can take a more explicit form that may be called “hermeneutic etymology,”²⁰ by which the origin (and not just the deeper meaning) of the word in question is explained. This technique is pervasive in midrash, and begins to appear even in the Bible. Thus Gen. 25.26: “And his hand had taken hold of Esau’s heel (‘*aqev*’); so they named him Jacob (Ya‘aqov)’; and

²⁰ These etymologies have been the subject of considerable discussion among participants in the Indology internet discussion group, where Jan Houben (citing P. Verhagen and Teun Goudriaan) has employed this apt label, distinguishing them from “linguistic etymologies” and noting that the Sanskrit tradition itself distinguishes between them (i.e., Yāska’s *Nirukta* vs. Pāṇinian analysis); see Houben in the Indology list archives (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucgadkw/indology.html>), 21 May 1996. For more discussion: Deeg 1995, Houben 1997. Patton 1996:137–144, surveys scholarly views of *nirukti* (etymology) in the Indic context.

Gen. 27.36: “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me (*wayya‘qeveni*) these two times.”

In the Brahmanical literature too this technique is used quite frequently:

By means of the sacrifice, the gods won this conquest which is the conquest they possess. They said, “Now how may this be inaccessible to men?” They sucked the sap of the sacrifice, as bees would suck out honey. Having drained the sacrifice and effaced it with the sacrificial stake, they disappeared. Then, because they effaced (*yup-*) with it, it is called *yūpa* (sacrificial stake). (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.1.4.3)

In an earlier era, such explanations were dismissed as “folk etymologies” (or simply “false etymologies”) on the assumption that the exegetes were linguistically naïve, or anyway were citing linguistically naïve popular etymologies. In fact, the Brahmanical tradition produced, not very long after the age of brahmana-composition, the most sophisticated linguistic science of the ancient world, one which excelled in accurately deriving words from verbal roots. The brahnavadins themselves were very sophisticated (indeed, they have tended to be faulted rather for sophistry). Rather, these etymologies operate on the assumption that grammatical derivation is not the only basis for semantic relationship. Phonological similarity is no accident, but reveals a “deep structure” of heavenly origin, in accordance with which invisibly related facts in the universe literally resonate with one another. In this sense, the audible form of the words provide a key to “reading” the world itself.

E. Numerical Affinity

Just as lexical affinities may be taken as indices of a linkage that provides access to deeper meanings, so too numerical affinities:

Eighteen times is [*As the Lord did*] *command* written in the section of the Tabernacle, corresponding to the eighteen vertebræ of the spinal column. Likewise the Sages instituted Eighteen Benedictions of the Prayer, corresponding to the Eighteen mentions [of the divine Name] in the reading of the *shema*, and also of [Psalm 29]. (*Leviticus Rabbah* 1.8)

This correlation of the arrangement of the human body with the arrangement of texts in liturgy appears also in a brahmana:

He offers this one with an *anuṣṭubh* verse, [which] consists of thirty-one syllables. Now there are ten fingers, ten toes, ten “breaths,” and the thirty-first is the body which contains those breaths. For this constitutes a man, and a man is worship; so the worship service is of the same proportion as a man. (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.1.4.23)

The various meters, which are called the “bodies” of the Vedic mantras, frequently serve as the measure both of elements in the ritual and aspects of the world.

He . . . fetches the utensils, taking two at a time, viz. the winnowing basket and the Agnihotra ladle, the wooden sword and the potsherds, the wedge and the black antelope skin, the mortar and the pestle, the large and the small mill-stones. These are ten in number; for the *virāj* meter has ten syllables and worship is radiant (*virāj*). The reason why he takes two at a time is because a pair means strength; for when two people undertake anything, there is strength in it. Moreover, a pair represents a copulation, so that a copulation [i.e., a productive joining of those paired elements] is thereby effected. (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.1.22)

F. Appeal to Convention or Natural Patterns

“The way things are”—in both the natural and social realms—may be cited as probative evidence supporting an interpretation. This includes references to common activities, common verbal expressions, and even the natural order of things. Thus *Genesis Rabbah* 1.1 (quoted above in section C) explains Prov. 8.30 first by means of a lexical affinity and then an appeal to human convention, to interpret it as meaning that the Torah was both plan and architect of the universe: “In the normal course of affairs, when a mortal king builds a palace he does not build it by his own skill but by the skill of an architect. Moreover, he does not build it out of his own head but makes use of plans and tablets in order to know how to make the rooms and the doors. Thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world.”

This approach—here combining appeals to the natural order and to convention—appears also in a brahmana explaining why the sacrificer puts on a new garment during the rite of self-consecration for worship:

That skin which the cow has was originally on man. The gods said, "The cow bears all this (world). Come, let us put on the cow that skin which is on man. With that she will be able to endure the rain, the cold, and the heat." Having flayed man, they put this skin on the cow. . . . For man is indeed flayed. Consequently, wherever a blade of grass or something cuts him, blood spurts out. So they put on him this skin—the garment, that is. Therefore, no one but man wears a garment. (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.1.2.13-16)

On this topic we find an extended set of ritual practices that are mirrored in the natural world:

The priests make him whom they consecrate an embryo again. . . . They lead him to the hut of the consecrated. The hut of the consecrated is the womb of the consecrated, so they lead him to his own womb. Therefore he sits and walks in a secure womb. Therefore embryos are set in and are born in a secure womb [lest they miscarry]. . . . They cover him with the garment. The garment is the amnion of the consecrated, so they cover him with the amnion. The black-antelope hide goes over it. The chorion is over the amnion, so they cover him with the chorion. He makes fists. The embryo lies inside making fists; the child is born making fists. . . . Taking off the black-antelope hide, he goes down to the final bath. Therefore embryos are born free of the chorion. He goes down with the garment on. Therefore a child is born with the caul. (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1.3)

In all these cases the implication is that things happen today in the world on account of how it was "in the beginning" or how it is in the timeless rites of worship. What people witness around them are the enduring traces of those primordial facts.

Another typical variant of this approach is to refer to some supposedly common idiom which is presented as evidence to support an exegesis of a mantra used in worship:

May we rejoice in increase of wealth and in nectar! (VS 4.1). Increase of wealth means abundance, and abundance means prosperity; he thereby invokes a blessing. *May we rejoice in nectar (iṣ)*—for people say of one who attains prosperity and high distinction: "He enjoys the nectar!" That is why he says, *May we rejoice in nectar!* (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.1.1.12)

In other words, the words "increase of wealth" and "nectar" both signify prosperity, and the meaning of *iṣ* is further clarified by noting its role in conventional speech.

G. Rhetorical Narrative

The techniques considered so far are conceptual devices that may be applied in a variety of textual settings. There are also exegetical ways of using entire narratives, apart from any use of gloss, paraphrase, or explanatory remarks: we may call these rhetorical narratives. The Rabbinic tradition has been somewhat more self-conscious about the different ways stories can be used exegetically, but the later Brahmanical tradition also made some basic distinctions. Below, I have adopted the primary Judaic categories, with examples, and shown how the Brahmanical literature exhibits quite similar types of story, for similar purposes. In this I am relying heavily of the analysis of Stern (1991).

i. Parable (*mashal*)

David Stern quotes W.J. Verdenius's definition of the Greek *ainos* as "an allusive narrative told for an ulterior purpose" (1991:24). The parable is more precisely an account told to elicit in the audience a recognition that the case at hand is parallel in multiple respects. The narrator's view is implicit in the story itself. The parable may be presented with little comment, or its implied message, the moral of the fable, may be stated explicitly. Rabbinic *mashals* usually come with an explanation (the *nimshal*), which shows how to apply the story to the subject at hand, the "exegetical occasion."

It is written: *A song of Asaph. O God, heathens have entered Your domain* [Ps. 79:1]. A song! It should have said, "A weeping"! R. Eleazar [ben Pedat] said: **It is like** a king who made a bridal-chamber, and decorated it. One time his son angered him, and the king destroyed the bridal-chamber. The pedagogue sat down and began to sing. [People] said to him: The king has destroyed his son's bridal-chamber, and you sit and sing! He said to them: For this reason I sing: For I said, Better that he poured out his anger upon his son's bridal-chamber, and not upon his son. (*Eikhah Rabbah* 4.11A; Stern 1991:24)

The *nimshal* that follows this *mashal* proper points out: "Similarly, people said to Asaph: The Holy One, blessed be He, has destroyed His temple, and you sit and sing! He said to them: For this reason I sing:

For I said: Better that the Holy One, blessed be He, poured out His anger upon wood, stones, and dirt and not upon Israel [itself].”

Rabbinic *meshalim* are usually narrated in the past tense, but the point is to propose a situation that is analogous in some sense. The language of comparison is usually present in an introductory phrase of the type “It is like. . .” Something similar occurs in Brahmanic texts:

“Breath is *brahman* [spiritual essence],” so Kauṣītaki used to say. . . . And to this breath, *brahman*, all these deities [the faculties of thought, sight, hearing, speech] bring offerings without its having to ask. All beings likewise bring offerings to a man who knows this, without his ever having to ask. That is his secret (*upaniṣad*): He should not ask. **It is like** (*tad yathā*) a man who begs in a village and receives nothing. He should sit down, vowing: “I’ll never eat anything given from here.” Thereupon, the very same people who may have previously spurned him offer him invitations. (*Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 2.1; adapted from Olivelle 1996:206)

In this case, the *meshal*-like narrative is very brief, and is not followed by anything like a *nimshal*, or rather, in this case, it precedes: The insight of one who knows the mystical divinity of the breath among the human sense faculties confers special power and compels recognition from others just as does the oath of a virtuous man who has been denied alms.

ii. Paradeigma (*ma’aseh, purākalpa*)

While Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 2.20) would regard the parable as a variety of paradeigma (i.e., one invented by the speaker), the typical paradeigma per se is presented as something that once happened that exemplifies a situation under discussion when it is introduced. While still serving a rhetorical purpose, the paradeigma is more direct. Its force depends upon the assumption that what was the case in the past will hold true in future as well. A well-known example recounts the conduct of two students who omitted a postprandial prayer; one follows the rule of Shammai and returns to the spot to recite it; the other, who knowingly omitted the prayer, hypocritically invokes the rule of Hillel that one need not if the omission was unintentional:

Once there were two students. One forgot [to say grace] and acted in accordance with the House of Shammai, [and when he went back. . .] he found a purse of gold. The other disciple willfully [neglected to say grace], acted in accordance

with the House of Hillel [and did not return,] and a lion ate him. (*Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot* 53b; Stern 1991:14)

The purpose of the *ma'aseh* is to illustrate the results of their conduct, as an indication of what would result from the same actions today.

In the Brāhmaṇas, there is a somewhat similar genre that is almost always used to provide an etiology for a particular practice. The protagonists are either “the gods” (*devas*) just before or just after they overcame their opponents the Asuras, to win their immortality and their place in heaven; or else the story tells of various sages of old. The events recounted are meant to indicate the course of action to be followed or avoided, based on the consequences of similar actions on the earlier occasion. Thus:

[King] Divodāsa, whose chief priest was Bharadvāja, was once beset by various enemies. He went to [his priest], saying: “Sage, find me a refuge.” [Bharadvāja] found a refuge for him by means of this *sāman* (the Adārasṛ chant) . . . “By means of this [chant], we have not fallen into a pit” (*dāre nāsṛma*)!” Hence it has its name: Adārasṛ. He who in praising practices the Adārasṛ finds a way out of his difficulties and does not run into a pit. (*Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 25.3.7)

Here, the paradeigma, applying a hermeneutic etymology, asserts that just as the Adārasṛ chant saved the fortunes of King Divodāsa (and acquired its name), so it benefits all who use it. A longer paradeigma (*ŚB* 12.9.3) illustrates how a banished king and a banished priest teamed up to regain their positions by performing the Sautrāmaṇī rite in an ingenious fashion. Another king confronts the priest, Cākra Sthapati, with a seemingly insoluble dilemma: “Sthapati Cākra, they say that *surā*-liquor must not be offered in the Offering Fire, nor anywhere else but the Offering Fire. . .” In spite of this, Cākra manages to find a way to perform the offerings: he pours the libations into special fires taken from the Offering Fire, so that one can say that the libations are made neither in the Offering Fire (directly), or in a fire that is not (indirectly) the Offering Fire. This precedent is thus advanced to explain the accepted practice in this rite.

iii. Allegory

Allegory as a narrative device may be found in parables and paradeigmata, but there are occasions on which the entire narrative has an extended allegory as its basic structure. In this respect, I am using the term not in the broad sense of using narrative elements to refer to something beyond itself, but in the narrower sense of personifying or reifying abstract ideas in unified narrative in order to make a statement about those ideas. Allegory of this sort is so common and well recognized in midrash that I need not supply an example; it is less so in brahmana, so I will provide a couple of instances. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11.6.1) tells how Bṛghu travels in the four directions and witnesses horrifying sights of dismemberment and cannibalism, and a black man with yellow eyes standing between two beautiful women. His father explains that the sights represent trees, cattle, plants, and water, which may be appeased by using them properly in worship; the three figures depicted Wrath, with Belief and Unbelief, who are appeased with an offering during worship. *ŚB* 3.2.1.18–28 explains why the consecrated Soma-offerer wears a deer's horn on his belt by recounting how the gods send Yajña (Worship personified) to seduce Vāc (Speech), so that they could usurp her god-begetting capacity. They tear out her womb and compress it into the shape of the horn, so that the consecrated may use it to secure new birth in the womb of Speech.

The Exegete as Virtuoso

What makes such interpretation persuasive is not simply the persuasiveness of the techniques per se but the special qualities of the exegete himself. The rabbinic or brahmanic sage might well be considered a virtuoso in his domain, both in the archaic sense of “a learned or ingenious person, or one that is well qualified” on account of his investigations in his field,²¹ and in the modern sense of someone extraordinarily skilled in the techniques of his art. Midrash or brahmana is assumed to demonstrate total mastery of the subject, an ability to encompass

²¹ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (1656), s.v.

the entire scope of all divine knowledge as it is manifested in the sacred canon (or in the ritual of worship), and a creative curiosity that leads the exegete to experiment with novel applications of the principles of exegesis, and even to develop new techniques. There is even something of the performer in the oratorical flair of a Rav Kahana or a Yājñavalkya. The authority of the sage is such that his explanations are endowed with the status of divine wisdom (Oral Torah as an extension of Written Torah; brahmana alongside mantra as *śruti*). It is suggestive that in both traditions, the interpretive enterprise begins by codifying and explaining correct practice; this is the context in which the basic techniques start to be applied. Only gradually does reflection on the deeper significance of the sacred texts themselves become detached from ceremonial concerns as a genre to be treated in its own right (as *Midrash Rabbah*, etc., and as *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad*, to some extent, and much later as commentary).

The virtuosic exegete is a different kind of religious authority than the priest, although, in India at least, the categories overlapped to a large extent. In both traditions there was a move away from the classical priestly cult (albeit for different reasons): whereas the professional priest has a natural interest in maintaining the primacy of the cult, the exegete, despite his reverence for the cult, lists toward an elevation of the tools and materials of his craft: the words, the ideas, and the mystical dimensions of the process of study. In India, where the priestly tradition never ceased, the ritual office has continued (if only fragmentarily, and usually on a very modest scale) for two-and-a-half millennia since the brahmanas were composed, but most priests are completely ignorant of the precise meanings of the texts they recite, while those few inheritors of the exegetical tradition are scholars, *paṇḍitas*, rather than priests.

III. Interpretive Agendas

Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee,
and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!

Psalm 141.2

From Priestly Cult to Personal Piety

The decline in importance of the Temple cult among the Jews really began with the destruction of the first Temple and the Babylonian exile, and continued with the proliferation of sects in the second Temple period, although the Rabbinic literature does not take shape until after the destruction of the second Temple.²² But the biblical centrality of the Temple persists as a ideal locus of power and divine mystery, and in the absence of the Temple and the priestly routine, a compact codification of the Temple cult (comprising about half of the *Mishnah*) comes to be deemed necessary.

On the other hand, we know little about the circumstances that led to the production of similar treatments of the Vedic priestly ritual, the *śrauta sūtras*. These works, just like the *Mishnah*, are concise, aphoristic codifications of the priestly cult—so concise as to require oral expansion.²³ They likewise include little or no explanation of the reasons for or significance of the words and actions in the rites, although some of the earlier ones (e.g., *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*) lack the radical compression of the more refined representatives of this genre, and bits of true brahmana appear here too. Unlike the *Mishnah*, the *śrauta sūtras* depend on and refer to an earlier canonized body of exegesis of the Vedic liturgy. The cult no doubt was still being practiced, but its complex rules, so lovingly ramified by the various lineages of priests in an earlier era, now had come to seem unwieldy in its scope and variety. The production of the *sūtras* filled the need for an easily memorized conspectus and systematization of the cult, and one that was more complete than the description embedded in the

²² Nickelsburg and Stone (1983) offer a collection of post-Exilic sources that illustrate this point.

²³ See Halivni's remarks (1986:93–94) on the brevity of the *Mishnah*.

brahmanas—for in those texts ritual injunctions (*vidhi*) were included primarily to introduce an explanation. The *sūtras* maintain the habit of preserving divergent opinions, but these opinions are not debated. At most, the *sūtra* may pass final judgment by supporting one of the views.

Concomitant with the promulgation of authoritative ritual codes in each tradition was the beginning of a process of transferring ritual responsibility from the priesthood to the learned individual. The ancient rabbis saw themselves as carrying forward the project of the Pharisees: “the extension of holiness from the limits of the Jerusalem Temple to a wider range of everyday life.”²⁴ It is important to note that the proto-Rabbinic circles were sharply distinct from the priestly community, and the Rabbinic genre does not come into its own until the Temple period had ended.

These Judaic developments are well known and have been thoroughly discussed, while the Brahmanical case is less clear. The most important differences from the Judaic case are the fact that the Brahmanical exegetes were drawn directly from the priestly castes, and the fact there was no sudden interruption of the Vedic cult, which was not tied to any particular site and was thus not as vulnerable to political interference or destruction, nor was it geographically inaccessible to a large part of its clientele. But there are other factors that likely posed a challenge to the Vedic priestly system. The time when the ritual *sūtra* literature was being composed (ca. 7th–5th c. BCE) appears to have coincided with the sudden growth of urban centers in the Ganges-Yamuna valley, which no doubt had repercussions on the village-based clan-dominated caste society in which the Vedic religion was rooted. With this urbanization came a new form of political power: the old tribal oligarchies began to be replaced by hereditary kings who presided not over a social unit but over a region (*janapada*), leading to an ever greater consolidation of power in dominant kingdoms, and culminating in the creation of the Mauryan empire in 321 BCE, just six years after Alexander of Macedon’s victories in the northwest.

²⁴ Goldenberg 1984:130.

We have no direct evidence of the effects of these social and political changes on the Vedic priesthood, but one likely effect was the loss of much of the traditional patronage of the Arya chieftains as power and wealth accumulated in the new cities. It has been observed many times that the word *nagara*, 'city,' makes a very late and rare appearance in the Vedic literature; the Vedic idea of civilization is the *grāma*, the village or "settlement." There is also the welter of new religious movements, some anti-Vedic and anti-brahmin (the early Jains and Buddhists among them) and others Brahmanical, that seem to have sprung up in and about the new cities. The earliest Buddhist texts (although not contemporary in the form in which we have them) contain an evident polemical streak in their references to brahmins, and are oriented to the public life of the new states.

Besides this presumable Jain-Buddhist threat to the socio-economic basis of the Vedic cult, another explanation (perhaps adequate in itself) is the mere fact of the spread of Brahmanical cult outside its core area (where the *śrauta* system acquired its fullest form), which entailed a more self-conscious standardization, and eventually called for simplified versions of the tradition that could be recognized and applied by a wider range of people over a wider area.

On the basis of this admittedly circumstantial evidence I propose that the brahmin priesthood sought to consolidate and extend its support among the middle rungs of rural society by encouraging the study of Vedic texts by a wider range of classes, and by remodeling and standardizing household ritual in imitation of the *śrauta* priestly cult through the promulgation of codes of household ritual, the *grhya sūtras*. The *grhya sūtras* were intended to apply a standard of consistency similar to that achieved in the *śrauta sūtras* to the other spheres of Vedic ritual, a diverse amalgam of services for the gods, life-cycle rites (*samskāras*), agricultural and hospitality rites, rites for practical ends, expiations and exorcisms.²⁵ Household rites akin to those in the

²⁵ The classic survey of these topics is Gonda 1980.

gr̥hya sūtras appear to be ancient,²⁶ but it is noteworthy that they were not deemed worthy of priestly textual treatment until the *sūtra*-making enterprise was well under way. For the most part, the *gr̥hya sūtras* make explicit reference to their corresponding *śrauta sūtras* of the same Veda, and are often seen as continuations of them.²⁷ Although they are not necessarily from a much later period (in their core, at least), the *gr̥hya sūtras* as a class clearly imitate the *śrauta sūtras* in the ways they organize and present their material.

The apparent intention in formally canonizing the domestic ritual on the analogy of the *śrauta* system was fourfold:

- a. to provide greater consistency of practice within a school; or rather, the school defined itself by its distinctive practices, which were set out in a standardized fashion;
- b. to present the domestic rites as equivalent to the prestigious *śrauta* rites by increasing the parallelism between them, and (perhaps) by importing more *śrauta* mantras for use in the domestic rites;
- c. to make the householder-ritualist conform to *śrauta* priestly standards of performance (while still encouraging the participation of actual priests in the household rites);
- d. to encourage Veda-study by non-brahmins as prerequisite to proper ritual performance and, thus, to expand the duties of brahmins as teachers.

The attempt to encourage the study of Veda appealed to the idea that even simple rites performed with the correct knowledge were as effective as the elaborate multi-fire rites offered with lavish oblations by the prosperous warrior-chiefs of old, assisted by teams of up to

²⁶ Allusions to wedding and funeral rites are made in some late additions to the *Ṛg Veda* corpus in the form of hymns (10.85 and 10.12–18) that were probably even then used liturgically.

²⁷ The only exception to this rule is the *Kauśika Sūtra* of the *Atharva Veda*, which deals with *gr̥hya* rites (in a manner very different from manuals of the other Vedas). It has long been recognized that the *Vaitāna* [i.e., *śrauta*] *Sūtra* of this tradition is a later creation—hardly surprising, since the *Atharva Veda* has no place in the *śrauta* ritual.

seventeen well-paid priests. Such spectacular rites did continue to be put on by kings who wished to appeal to the traditional Vedic world view, but much of this patronage was now going to the monastic institutions of the ascetic sects. But the theory had been put forward in the more mystical works of the brahmana genre—those that have been transmitted under the title of “*āranyaka*,” “*rahasya*,” or “*upaniṣad*” (all signifying “esoteric doctrine”)—that all the power of the Veda could reside in the mere act of laying a piece of wood on the fire, or of feeding a brahmin, or simply of eating, or, most importantly, of reciting Vedic texts. Indeed, such forms of worship were actually superior, but they only worked for those initiated into the highest mysteries of the Veda; the esoteric brahmanas always end with the promise that the benefits will surely accrue to “him who knows this” (*ya evaṃ veda, evaṃvid*). Moreover, for brahmins, private recitation purges one of the taint of having “milked the meters dry” by serving as a paid priest in someone else’s worship rite (*Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 2). The virtue of this ideal was that the learned householder could become his own Vedic priest. Yet he could not do so without studying the Veda. Thus, the brahmin community may have compensated for any loss of patronage for the high-cult rites by extending its influence in the low-cult, and by simultaneously generating wider demand for instruction. This development also ensured that mantra-recitation became a central form of personal piety, along with the special rules of ritualized behavior meant to accompany private recitation. Recitation also becomes an important form of expiatory rite. The special virtue of recitation was usually explained by declaring that it constitutes the essence of worship. The basis for this claim lies in the exegesis of the brahnavadins.

Study as Sacrificial Offering

The idea is established early on in the brahmanas that the mantras recited during the worship service are an “invisible” or “cryptic” (*parokṣa*) form of worship, corresponding to the concrete, “visible” (*pratyakṣa*) form embodied in the ritual gestures: “For these (formulas)

are libations, and the libation is worship. The muttering of a formula²⁸ is (worship) invisibly (done), while the libation is worship (done) visibly” (*āhutayo hy ètā āhutir hí yajñāḥ paró ‘kṣaṃ vai yájur japaty áthaiśa pratyákṣaṃ yajñó yád āhutis*, *ŚB* 3.1.4.1). This gave rise to the idea that worship could be performed without recourse to (other forms of) ritual action; the mere recitation of mantras in study could count as a rite of offering.

The connection between the brahmavadin’s doctrine of the recitation-offering and the domestic ritual codes is perfectly illustrated by *Āśvalāyana Grhya Sūtra*, which begins with a passage of brahmana that uses the techniques of textual juxtaposition, paraphrase, and (at the end) the declaring of a mystical “linkage” to prove that the recitation of the Vedic word (the mantra), while placing a stick of wood on the fire, counts as even the finest oblation duly offered.

Furthermore, they quote the *Ṛg Veda*: *The mortal who, with a fuel-stick, with an oblation, with knowledge (véda), worships the fire, / who makes good sacrifices with obeisance. . . . [RV 8.19.5].*²⁹ When one who has faith (*śraddadhānaḥ*)³⁰ places even just a stick of firewood on (the fire), he should think: I am sacrificing here; obeisance to that (god). “Who, with an oblation . . . , who, with knowledge. . .” means that (the gods) are satisfied with knowledge alone. So seeing this, the sage said:

*To him who does not shun the cows, who seeks the cows, who dwells in the sky, / speak a wonderful word, sweeter than ghee and honey (RV 8.24.20).*³¹ By this he means: This word of mine, sweeter than ghee and honey, gives satisfaction (to the god); may it be sweeter.

²⁸ *Yajus*-formulae are muttered (*jap-*) quietly (*upāṃṣu*) in the sacrifice (*KŚS* 1.3.10; *ĀpYPS* 9–10), unless they are meant as an address, a reply, a selection of a priest, a part of a dialogue, or a command; *ṛc* and *sāman* texts are recited aloud (*uccaiḥ*) (*ĀpYPS* 8).

²⁹ *yāḥ samīdhā yá āhuti yó védena dadāśa mártō agnāye / yó námasā svadhvarāḥ //*

³⁰ That is, a sincere will to worship, and confidence in the power of *brahman*, Vedic speech.

³¹ *āgorudhāya gavīṣe dyukṣāya dásmyaṃ vācaṃ / ghṛtāt svādīyo mādhuṇaś ca vocata //*

With a *Ṛg*-verse, we bring to you, O Agni, an oblation fashioned by the heart. / May they be oxen, bulls, and cows for you (*RV* 6.16.47).³² By this (he means): These (verses) become my oxen, bulls, and cows—I who recite the private recitation (*svādhyāya*).³³ And “who makes good sacrifices with obeisance” (in the earlier verse) means: even with the exclamation of obeisance alone (*namaskāreṇa vai khalv api*).³⁴ For a Brāhmaṇa states, “The gods are not beyond the exclamation of obeisance (*namaskāram ati*). Obeisance is worship.” (*Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* 1.1.4-5)

This replacement of actual, material sacrifices with sacrifices consisting only of recited verses and formulas has its parallels in the Judaic literature. The idea is already available as a poetic or rhetorical metaphor in biblical passages such as Psalm 141.2 (quoted as the epigraph to part III, above). Later, rabbinic authors use very Brahmanical-sounding arguments to show how, for instance, the study of the rules of Temple ritual can effectively replace the performance of the rituals themselves:

Resh Lakish said, What is the significance of the verse, *This is the law for the burnt-offering, for the meal-offering, for the sin-offering, and for the guilt-offering* [Lev. 7:37]? It teaches that whosoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah is as though he were offering a burnt-offering, a meal-offering, a sin-offering, and a guilt-offering. Raba [said,] it means that whosoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah needs neither burnt-offering, nor meal-offering, nor sin-offering, nor guilt-offering. R. Isaac said, What is the significance of the verses, *This is the law of the sin-offering* [Lev. 6:18]; and *This is the law of the guilt-offering* [Lev. 7:1]? They teach that whosoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the sin-offering is as though he were offering a sin-offering, and whosoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the guilt-offering is as though he were offering a guilt-offering. (*Babylonian Talmud, Menaḥoth* 110a)

³² *ā te agna ṛcā havīr hṛdā taṣṭām bharāmasi / té te bhavantūkṣāṇa ṛṣabhāso vaśā utā //*

³³ That is, “may they be my offerings to you.”

³⁴ *Namaskāra* indicates the word “*namas*” itself, used as an exclamation of honor directed toward the deity. The implication is that the mere utterance of the word “obeisance!” constitutes a sacrifice.

All these surmises are based on the circumstance that the passages cited announce the laws of the offerings, rather than just announcing the offerings themselves. This, they argue, means that studying the law is equivalent to making the actual offerings themselves.

These two examples could be supplemented with many others if space permitted. It might be argued that equating recitation of liturgy with ritual performance is not quite the same as equating study of the rules of liturgy with actual performance. But this seeming difference is minimal. Private recitation (*svādhyāya*) is the preeminent form of study in Vedism, and the recitations may include both ritual utterances (mantra) and brahmana-analysis. What is basic to both cases is the idea that benefits of the priestly offerings can be accrued by any learned individual, and is not left in the hands of priests themselves. In India, this meant that members of other Arya castes, as well as brahmins without priestly training, could participate directly in the highest form of worship. Moreover, this study-qua-sacrifice is presented as a duty, an obligation for every capable member of the community. The pious individual thus is provided with the means, and the responsibility, to perform himself the signal acts of piety of the tradition.

Conclusion

I have tried to show that the marked similarities in the hermeneutical principles developed in the Rabbinic and Brahmanical interpretive traditions go beyond the rhetorical techniques themselves. In fact they are part of largely parallel trajectory of exegesis devoted to explaining an elite priestly cult to the communities that define themselves by reference to that cult, and the texts that enshrine it. In both cases the tradition views the central divine revelation as the repository of infinite knowledge, and the aim of traditional scholarship is (in part) to establish the perfect form of ritual practice, and to engage in an exegetical method designed to uncover hidden meaning without infringing on the authority of the divine word. In the course of events, these virtuoso exegetes, endowed with the authority of revelation, provide a basis for transferring the sanctity and power of the priestly office—when changing circumstances affect the support or continuance of that office—to

the wider community by making textual study or recitation, as well as other forms of household ceremonial, equivalent to the priestly high cult. The comparison of religious forms thus is not divorced from the contextual factors governing the emergence and change of those forms. I have tried to make a comparison of historical processes, rather than a simple matching up of structural forms. In so doing, important differences have also come to light: the rise of rabbinics created an alternative source of authority to that of the hereditary priestly families. Although more work needs to be done on the social dimensions of priestly vs. scholarly work among Vedic brahmins, there is no clear sign of such a redistribution of authority in the Brahmanical case; the exegetic innovations came very much from within the priestly community, and seemed aimed at its own preservation.

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A BLEMMYA IN INDIA

J. DUNCAN M. DERRETT

Introduction

It is an important maxim, in religion as in literature or art, that “Whatever is received is received according to the manner and intention of the recipient.” Yet *Einflussforschung* cherishes instances of exact equivalence between the allegedly “influenced” text and its influencing source. While the controversy persists (now 150 years old), whether Buddhist scriptures influenced the gospels or vice versa,¹ one treasures every scrap of information, literary, architectural, sculptural, or numismatic, suggesting that Greco-Roman models were adopted into the Indian *Kulturbesitz*. “India” for this purpose includes modern Afghanistan. Since Indian texts seldom are securely dated, a Western parallel is of value which can be dated (within limits). By contrast, it may always be impossible to date the use of Homer in imagining the birth of the Buddha;² or, by an author of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (the widespread Lotus Sūtra), of an Ovid-style tradition of the Phoenix.³ Wherever a datable parallel can be proved one is well-placed to ask: how was the model obtained; what was its suitability or attraction; what effect was it intended to have; and why were related items⁴ not adopted at the same time?

¹ J.D.M. Derrett, *The Bible and the Buddhists*, Bornato in Franciacorta: Sardini, 2000.

² J.D.M. Derrett, “Homer in India: the Birth of the Buddha,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 2, 1992, 161–176.

³ J.D.M. Derrett, “Early Buddhist use of two Western themes,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd. ser. 12, pt. 3, 2002.

⁴ Why were cyclopes, etc., omitted (n. 60 below)?

Objectors to “influence” by Buddhists upon the Christian scriptures demand that parallels should be scrupulously precise and inescapable. One striking candidate, also from the Lotus Sūtra, is the motif of earthquakes enabling saints to rise from caves or tombs.⁵ A distinct echo of Greece exists in the Βλέμυες (*alias* Βλέμυες, Blemmyae, Blemmyes) figuring twice in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*. The learned translators of the relevant *Samyutta-nikāya* portion⁶ did not draw attention to it, not through ignorance (for Blemmyae in literature see below), but possibly afraid that it would fuel suspicion that Buddhist scripture, believed to have been in existence (as late as) in the third century B.C.,⁷ could have been indebted to first-century Greece or Rome, or to Egypt a little earlier; for if that were so the New Testament itself would have been available to early Buddhists, a proposition by no means agreeable to nineteenth-century philo-Buddhists. That the Old Testament was used by Buddhists of that early period can neither be doubted, nor regretted.⁸

The Vision

In the *Vinaya-piṭaka* and *Samyutta-nikāya* of the *Sutta-piṭaka*⁹ a celebrated pupil of Gotama Buddha, Moggallāna the Great, notorious

⁵ Derrett, cited at n. 1 above, no. 37 at p. 74. Add *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* XXVII, trans. H. Kern (SBE 21), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884, repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1963, 442.

⁶ Caroline A.F. Rhys Davids (d. 1942, see *Who Was Who?*), *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*. Part II. *The Nidāna Book*, assisted by F.H. Woodward, London 1982 (originally published in 1922), 173.

⁷ Aśoka's Bhabrā edict: Derrett, n. 1 above, 36 n. 33.

⁸ J.D.M. Derrett, “Diffusion: Korah and Devadatta,” *Archiv Orientalní* 63, 1995, 330–333; W. Kirfel, “Indische Parallelen zum Alten Testament,” *Saeculum* 7 (1956), 369–354 at pp. 378–379. 1 Jings 3:16–27 at Jātaka 546.

⁹ *Vinaya* iii (ed. H. Oldenberg, London 1883), IV.9.3, pp. 104–108 at p. 107 and S II (ed. L. Feer, London 1888) sec. XIX, pp. 254–262. (For the abbreviations, see n. * at p. 473 below.)

for his magical powers¹⁰ and for his visions,¹¹ is delighted¹² to observe, passing through the air, a series of twenty-one creatures all being pecked and dismembered by scavenger birds and birds of prey, while uttering cries of distress,¹³ whether or not they had mouths with which to cry out. This list is important, for many of the creatures, having violated the Buddhist rule of not taking life, here join other offenders, to be identified by the Buddha himself as delinquents released from hell and completing their punishments prior to being reborn in some evil condition.¹⁴ A common principle of many of the sufferings is *talio* (illustrated at M iii. 203, trans., iii. 249–250). As they did in life so they suffer now, sometimes more so. One is a mere skeleton, another a lump of flesh, another a quantity of flesh, while a fourth is flayed. Some are identified as comparatively recent malefactors *viz.* two cattle-butchers, a fowler, a sheep-butcher, a pig-butcher, a sycophant,¹⁵ an adulterer, a mocking Brahmin (who

¹⁰ A i.23, trans., 16. He caused houses to quake: S LI, vii, 2(4), trans., v.241–2; M i.253, trans., i.309. Fa-Hian, *Fo-kwo-ki*, ch. 17 at S. Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, London 1884, repr. New York 1968, i, xxxix–xli; Hiuen Tsiang, *Ta-t'ang. Si-yu-ki, ibid.*, ii, 188–235, For C.A.F. Rhys Davids' suspicion see her *Old Creeds and New Needs*, London 1963, 80–81.

¹¹ He visited gods: M i.252, trans., i.307; S XL §10, trans., iv.185–189; LV xi,2 (viii–ix), trans., v.319; and hell: *Dhammapada Commentary* X.7, iii.65–71, trans., Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, pt.2, HOS 29, Harvard University Press, 1921, repr. Pali Text Soc., 1979, ii.304–307; and received messages from *devas*; A iii.122–123. trans., iii.95–96. H.C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1896, 221–224, 225; Introduction to *Jātaka* 522: v.125–126. E.J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, 141–142. The Buddha says the monks should aim to have such visions—which he himself had had earlier but did not reveal for fear of not being believed: S XIX, ii.261, trans., ii.174.

¹² S XIX 1,5–6,8, ii.254–255. Smiling allowed: A i.261, trans., i.239.

¹³ S XIX.19, ii.255, trans., ii.170ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* XIX.1,13;21, ii.255–256, trans., ii.170–174 (end). Continually taking life leads to rebirth as a ghost: A iv.247, trans., iv.169.

¹⁵ *gāmakūto*. See *Pali-English Dictionary*, s.v.

gives monks dirt to eat), an adulteress, a fortune-teller or confidence-trickster, a jealous chief queen, and (nos. 17–21) evil-living monks, nuns, and male and female novices of the remote period of a former Buddha.

No. 16 in this list is exotic, being a grotesque. He has no head (he is a headless trunk)¹⁶ with his eyes and mouth on his chest (*tassa ure akkhīni ceva honti mukhañca*).

Tersely described, his idiosyncrasy vaguely suggests two categories known to the Buddha. If he were “of bad colour,” “ugly,” “dwarfish” or “hunchbacked”, he would resemble those who, reborn as human beings, appear in a low caste, needy, of insecure livelihood, deformed, and destitute.¹⁷ They are “joined to darkness and fare to darkness.”¹⁸ A (hereditary) caste of hunchbacks would fit this category. Secondly, he reminds us of the condition, after release from hell, of those greedy persons who engaged in ascetic practices for low or mean motives: such people are despised in this life, and after release from hell become “great ghosts (looking like monks) of the craving type” wandering over the earth, with limbs emaciated . . . head swollen . . . horrible in appearance, ears torn, eyes blinking . . . stomach a mass of fire . . . without refuge, lamenting with cries for compassion.”¹⁹ With such ideas current, the Buddha proceeds to identify the peculiar individual espied by Moggallāna.

He identifies him (alone of the series) by name—Hārīka, suggesting “Snatcher” (*hārin* means “taking”). The translators²⁰ of the *Saṃyutta* passage translate it thus: “This being was a bandit named Hārīka in this

¹⁶ *asīsakaṃ kavandhaṃ*. The heading of 16(6), *sīsachinno* is of no known authority.

¹⁷ M iii.169–170, trans., iii.215; S i.94, trans., i.118–119; A ii.85, trans., ii.94–95. For ‘of ill colour’ see A i.246, trans., i.225.

¹⁸ S i.94 as translated by Mrs Rhys Davids. For such low conditions on rebirth see A i.100, trans., i.92. Illness and a short life-span: M iii.203,204, trans., iii.250.

¹⁹ *Milindapañho*, ed. V. Trenckner, London 1880, repr. London 1962, 357; trans. I.B. Horner, *Milinda’s Questions*, London 1969, vol. 2, 217–218. Miss Horner had before her the version of E. Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959, repr. 1971, 95.

²⁰ C.A.F. Rhys Davids and F.H. Woodward as at n. 6 above.

very (city) Rājagaha.”²¹ The text has the descriptive noun *coraghātaka*, thief-slaughterer, the technical term for “executioner.”²² A year later E.M. Hare rendered the word “cut-throat.”²³ The *talio* principle shows that our friend is headless because he regularly decapitated thieves by way of their last torture.²⁴ I.B. Horner, perhaps the most experienced translator, renders the word “executioner” at the *Vinaya* parallel.²⁵

Moggallāna’s vision concentrated on the trunk (*kavanda*) which bears eyes and mouth and can conceivably have a brain between the shoulders; but admittedly the word *sīsa-chinno* which an editor has inserted as the heading of this number (without authority) suggests that the head had been cut off, which is inconsistent. He may not be capable of having his throat cut but something controls his cries.

Blemmyae

Now what Moggallāna described is obviously an acephalite of the species *Blemmyae*.²⁶ To find one in an Indian text is startling, since rumours of *Blemmyae* in India, though they may be deduced from Pliny (a slip?), cannot be verified. *Blemmyae* do not appear in our Ctesias nor in Megasthenes nor in Strabo on India. Dogheads are another matter, but we are not concerned with them. Here we have a *Blemmya* (an African) in front-rank Buddhist texts of very respectable

²¹ *The Book of Kindred Sayings* (as at n. 6 above), 173.

²² *Pali-English Dictionary*, pt. 4, 105 (many Jātaka citations). D ii.321, trans., ii.352.

²³ A iii.273 rendering *coraghātaka* at text, iii.383, lines 23–24 as ‘cut-throats.’ Woodward’s version is at A ii.219.

²⁴ S ii.128; D i.276; M iii.16,171,181,209; A i.48; ii.123,241–243.

²⁵ *The Book of the Discipline*, I, London: Luzac for the P.T.S., 1949, 187.

²⁶ A. Littleton, *Latin Dictionary*, London⁶ 1735; Forcellini-Bailey, *Totius latinitatis lexicon*, London 1828; C.T. Lewis & C. Short, *Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1879, 1933; *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford² 1989, II, 278 (*Blemmya*) examples given with references (Norwich, Ripon). E.G. Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. London 1870, 1952, 1970, s.v. ‘Blemmyes.’

age.²⁷ To select him as the Buddha does as a typical executioner seems to imply that Buddhists' information about Blemmyae neglected rational social or political roles, throwing us back to a period when they were simply monsters: about that later. But meanwhile we should bear in mind that Indian contacts with Egypt by land and sea went back to the third century B.C. at the latest, so that oral and written information about it would not be scarce.

Blemmyae have a special place in European art, in the history of exploration, and notoriously in English literature, folklore, sculpture, and engraving. This is important, since it attests this particular monster's power of attracting speculation. Jehan de Mandeville (pseud. Jean d'Outremeuse [1371]) says (ch. XXIII)

And in another yle toward the south duellen folk of foul stature & of cursed kynde, that han none hedes & here eyen ben in here schouldres. And here mouth is croked as an horse shoo & that is in the myddes of here brest, And in another yle also ben folk that han non hedes & here eyen & here mouth ben behynde in here schuldres.²⁸

Here the author leans on the *Speculum Naturale* of Vincent of Beauvais (c. 1260) (Bk. 31, ch. 127, col. 2393 of the edition of 1524). On

²⁷ The Vinaya-piṭaka is regarded as very old, parts going back to the fourth century B.C., but subject to interpolation. Part 2 of S, which includes our S passage is chronologically placed in class 2c of the early portion of Pali scriptures. H. Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism. A Survey* . . ., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1987, 27, cf. 37–38, 57. A date before A.D. 200 would be an acceptable guess on the part of those not tied to traditions respecting 'dates'.

²⁸ P. Hamelius, ed., *Mandeville's Travels translated from the French of Jean d'Outremeuse edited from MS Cotton Titus C. XVI in the British Museum*, I, text, E.E.T.S. 153, London 1919, 133–134; II, Notes. E.E.T.S. 154, London 1923, 109–110, cf. 13: Leucani in Lybia they believe to be born as trunks without head, and having mouth and eye on/in the breast; others to be born without necks, having eyes on their shoulders (so Vincent of Beauvais). J.W. Bennett, "The woodcut illustrations in the English edition of Mandeville's Travels," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 47, 1953. In the modernized version published by M.C. Seymour, *Mandeville's Travels*, World's Classics 617, Oxford University Press, 1968, the passage reproduced above appears in ch. 22, p. 156.

“Mandeville” or conceivably Sir Walter Raleigh,²⁹ or both, Shakespeare relies when he makes Othello beguile Desdemona with tales of men “whose heads do grow neath their shoulders”;³⁰ and enriches his fantasies with them in *The Tempest*.³¹ Lewis Carroll (pseud. Charles Dodgson), whose social and religious satires masquerade as children’s entertainment, models a Blemmya, the uncouth, ill-natured sciolist, Humpty Dumpty.³² The nude Blemmya figuring at the edge of the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* (c. 1285)³³ has a waist; and so had Carroll’s model, the right-hand giant (illustrating Numbers 13:22, 31–33 and Deuteronomy 1:28, 1:10, 21; 9:2)³⁴ which, with his club-bearing colleague on the left, appears on a misericord (1489–94) in Ripon Cathedral where Dodgson’s father was a Canon 1852–68.³⁵ The Ripon

²⁹ *The Discoverye of the Large, Rich & Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, London 1596 (two editions); L. Hulsius, *Brevis et admiranda descriptio regni guianae*. . . 1594, 1595, 1596. The Ewaipanoma, illustrated, seem to have been entirely fabulous. J. Winton, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, London 1975, 171–172.

³⁰ *Othello* (1604–1605), Act I, scene iii, lines 144–145 (G.B. Evans, ed. *Riverside Shakespeare*, Boston 1974, 1208). An illustration (woodcut) of a clothed Blemmya appears at p. 1202, claiming to be taken from an edition of the English Mandeville of 1582. (Hartmann Schedel) *Liber chronicarum cum figuris et ymaginibus ab inicio mundi*, Augsburg 1493, 1497 (under “India”—‘India’ and ‘Ethiopia’ were often confused in the Middle Ages).

³¹ *Tempest* (?1611–12), Act III, scene iii, lines 46–47.

³² *Through the Looking-glass and what Alice found there*, London 1896, ch. 6.

³³ P.D. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: the Hereford World Map*, Hereford & London 1991; W.L. Bevan & H.W. Phillott, *Medieval Geography—an Essay in Illustration of the Hereford Mappa Mundi*, Hereford & London 1873; A.L. Moir with M. Letts, *The World Map in Hereford Cathedral*, Hereford 1979; Scott D. Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, Turnhoo 2001, 382–383.

³⁴ L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Soc., 1968, I, 151; III 268–270, 273.

³⁵ J.S. Purvis, “The use of continental woodcuts and prints by the Ripon school of woodcarvers in the early sixteenth century,” *Archaeologia* 85, 1936, 107–128, esp. pl. XXX, fig. 2. Christa Grössinger, *Ripon Cathedral Misericords*, Ripon Cathedral 1989 (see no. 17). The reason why this misericord has neither flowers nor leaves nor fruits as its “supporters” is that such embellishment would reduce the Blemmyae and obscure the fact that the biblical giants were indeed gigantic as shown in many illustrations

Blemmyae, now unique,³⁶ may derive from a continental manuscript, since they are absent in this form from the *Biblia pauperum*³⁷ and the various editions of the Nuremberg Chronicle.³⁸

Blemmyae appear first (without their name) in Herodotus (c. 560–420), who places them (correctly) in Africa.

IV.191, 3: The eastern side of Libya, where the nomads live, is low and sandy, as far as the river Triton. But westward of that land, the land of the husbandmen, is very hilly, well-wooded and abounding in wild beasts. . . . Here too are the Dogheads, and the Headless who have their eyes in their breasts, as the Libyans report of them; and wild men and wild women and many other beasts which are *not* fabulous.

By the mid-third century B.C. Blemmyae were famous, otherwise Theocritus' "curse" at VII, 113–114 would fall flat:

Mayest thou wander by the remotest Ethiopans and feed thy flock by the Blemyes' rock from whence Nile is not yet visible!

Strabo gives the location, the name, and character, but not the strange shape. Dying about 21 B.C., he had personal knowledge of Egypt and regions southwards through his acquaintance with C. Cornelius Gallus, prefect of Egypt under Octavius in 30 B.C. and explorer of Arabia.³⁹ He will have learned of the Blemmyae—not unheard-of, therefore, in Alexandria, entrepôt of all myths and legends.

of Blemmyae. The carvers' choice of Blemmyae may have been dictated by their description of Israelite humans as grasshoppers (how were their *heads* to be accounted for?) (Numbers 13:33; Isaiah 40:22).

³⁶ Purvis, 'Use', 121 (the 'Nobodies').

³⁷ For MSS see *Enc. Brit.*, 11th edn., vol. 27, 511a; blockbooks c. 1460 *ibid.*, 512a, including 1471 (Hans Spoerer), 512d (no. 20); and many Netherlandish editions, *ibid.*, 513a.

³⁸ Hartmann Schedel, *Registrum hujus operis libri chronicarum* (see n. 30 above). German versions 1495, 1500. The Blemmya illustrated has no club and is seated—evidently not the model of the Ripon Blemmya.

³⁹ Pauly-Wissowa 164; *Der Kleine Pauly* I, 1964, 1316–1317 (Cornelius 20); OCD³ 1996, 394–395.

Strabo XVII.1, 2:⁴⁰ In the more southerly parts on each side of Meroe, along the Nile, towards the Red Sea, live the Megabari and Blemmyes, subject to the Ethiopians, sharing a border with Egypt.

XVII.1, 53:⁴¹ The remainder towards the South (is occupied by) Troglodytes and Blemmyes and Nubians and Megabari, Ethiopians above Syene. These are nomadic, neither numerous nor warlike, but feared by people in the past because of their often falling upon unguarded (settlements) in a piratical manner (ληστρικῶς).

A desert-dwelling semi-civilized nomadic Ethiopian tribe or people might well be famous for attacking “piratically” (combining robbery and murder) the rich and peaceful inhabitants of the Nile Valley; “the Blemmyes remained the terror of Egypt for many centuries to come.”⁴² As for the etymology of their name, the alleged Coptic “blind”;⁴³ or Blemy, an Ethiopian king, as suggested by the highly-qualified Nonnus;⁴⁴ are less interesting than Bochart’s⁴⁵ derivation from a hypothetical Ethiopian equivalent of the Hebrew *belî môah* (“without brain”)! The derogatory description may or may not derive from their ornamenting their shields with faces;⁴⁶ but evidence that Somali tribesmen in conclave squatted behind their shields with their eyes just above the rims may not be irrelevant.⁴⁷ Such conjectures are futile: similarly a guess that they reminded people of the *dyed* pillar

⁴⁰ *Strabonis geographica*, ed. A. Meineke, Leipzig 1877, 1097. C.786.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1142–1143. C.819.

⁴² *Enc. Brit.*, 11th edn., vol. 9, 89. Rostovzeff-Frazer (n. 59 below), 737.

⁴³ H.W. Helck at *Kl. Pauly* I, 913.

⁴⁴ Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* XVII, 385–397 (Loeb edn., *Dionysiaca* II, 61). Nonnus was a fourth/fifth century Greek writer of Panopolis on the Nile (Akhmim 31°46'E 26°30'N), who went on embassy to Ethiopia amongst the ‘Saracens’ and other eastern peoples.

⁴⁵ S. Bochardius (1599–1667), *Geographia sacra* I. *Phaleg* (Caen 1646), Bk 4, ch. 29, p. 317. Bochardius was known for his ‘chimerical etymologies.’

⁴⁶ J. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races In Medieval Art and Thought*, Cambridge MA 1982, 12, 15, 25, 146, 178–179.

⁴⁷ (Sir) Richard F. Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, London: Longmans 1856 (further edns., 1910, 1966, 2000), ch. 6.

erected in Egypt to honour Osiris, which has a face on its trunk.⁴⁸ But sufferers see their tormentors as monsters.

Pomponius Mela (A.D. 43–4) speaks of the Blemmyae thus:

Chorogr. 1.4 (23):⁴⁹ We hear first from the East of the Garamantes, afterwards Augiles and Trogodytes (*sic*), and last towards the West the Atlas tribe. Between, if one likes to believe it, Goat-Pans, Blemyes, Gamphasantes, and Satyrs, scarcely human, rather half-wild, without roofs or homes, having the land, as they wander, rather than owning it. *Ibid.* 1.8 (57–58):⁵⁰ Gamphasantes are naked and ignorant of all weapons . . . so they flee from those they meet, and do not allow others to meet or talk with them unless they are of the same mentality. Blemmyae have no heads, their face is in their breast. Satyrs have nothing human except their appearance. . . . So much for Africa.

It is Mela who made the connection between the Blemmyae and their deformity. Their way of life is indicated by “half wild.” Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* was compiled by A.D. 79. He follows Mela.

N.H. V.8, 44 (Africa): In the middle of the desert some place the Atlas tribe, and next to them the half-animal Goat-Pans and the Blemmyae and Gamphasantes and Satyrs and Strapfoots. *Ibid.* 46: The Blemmyae are reported to have no heads, their mouth and eyes being attached to their chests. *Ibid.* VII (the human race) 2, 23: . . . and that they are not far from the Trogodytes; and again westward from there there are some people without necks, having their eyes in their shoulders. *Ibid.* 2, 32: These and similar varieties of the human race have been made by the ingenuity of Nature as toys for herself and marvels for us. And indeed who could possibly recount the various things she does every day and almost every hour? Let it suffice for the disclosure of her power to have included whole races of mankind among her marvels. From these we turn to a few admitted marvels in the case of the individual human being (trans., Loeb edn., vol. 2).

⁴⁸ W. Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* I, London 1911; B. Van de Walle, ‘L’érection du pilier *djed*’, *La Nouvelle Clío* 6, 1954, 283–287; L.V. Zabkar, *Apedemak*, Warminster 1975, index, s.v. Blemmye(s). References owed to V.A. Donohue.

⁴⁹ Edited by K. Frick, Leipzig 1880, repr. 1935, 6^{24–29}.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 11^{27–123}. Artists welcomed ‘face’ as allowing Blemmyae with *noses* also. Noseless monsters *were* known, after all (Strabo).

After Pliny come a row of references and allusions to Blemmyae, which, being derivative, are of no interest.⁵¹ Amongst mediaeval remains the *Mappa Mundi* (above) is instructive, where there is a male and female pair, the male having both eyes and mouth on his chest (Westrem, p. 383, item 971) and the female having both eyes and mouth in her shoulders (to make room for the *mammae*?) (Westrem, *ibid.*, 973). So the *Mappa's* author (Richard of Haldingham) believed both those definitions correct. On the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* and in several early illustrations, as well as at Ripon, the Blemmyae are equipped with *clubs*.⁵² Illustrations of Blemmyae are numerous,⁵³ including some that take "Mandeville" literally. Explorers often enquired of natives and travellers what monsters were to be found in foreign parts;⁵⁴ and the Blemmyae figure often, even with that perhaps greatest of explorers, Sir Richard Burton.⁵⁵ The suggestion that the Blemmyae's deformity was a punishment for sin is an Indian idea, not found in the secular-minded West.

The wit of Edward Gibbon (1776) blended information from Strabo and Pliny while dealing with the Blemmyae's political, strategical, and diplomatic relations in the *third* century and after.⁵⁶ Roman emperors

⁵¹ Solinus (c. 260) 13,4–5; Vopiscus (305), *Aur.* 33,4; *Prob.* 17,19; Memertinus (362), *geneth. Maxim.* 17; Claudian (400), *carm. de Nilo*, v.19 *per Meroen, Blemmyasque feras, atramque Syenem*, 'through Meroe, the savage Blemmyae, and black Syene.' Isidore of Seville (622–633), *Etymologiae, Originum libri XX*, 11.3,17. For Solinus see Moir-Letts (above, n. 33), 12.

⁵² See nn. 37–38 above.

⁵³ For Schedel see above, n. 38. F. Odle, *Picture Story of World Exploration*, London 1966, where one finds giant examples carrying clubs.

⁵⁴ For the ancient world see Philostratus, *V. Apoll.* 3. 45–47, and Damascius (5th–6th cent.), *Life of Isidorus* at Photius, *Bibliotheca*, ed. Bekker, Berlin 1825, ii, 340, col. 2, lines 7–10. For the modern world notice the curiosity Sir Walter Raleigh had to satisfy with the mythical Ewaipanoma (n. 29 above). I have not checked rumours of Blemmyae located in (?) Mexico by the Spaniards.

⁵⁵ See n. 47 above.

⁵⁶ F.W. Wallbank and A.E. Aston *et al.*, edd. *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd. edn., vol. 7, pt.1, *The Hellenistic World*, Cambridge 1984), map 3, p. 121. Blemmyae appear in Nubia to the East, West of the Trogodytes.

must take the field against them and even conciliate them, which would hardly fit the “piratical life” (parasitism) reported by Strabo.

Decline & Fall, ch. 13: (in A.D. 296–7) even the Blemmyes renewed, or rather continued, their incursions into the Upper Egypt. . . . Since the usurpation of Firmus, the province of Upper Egypt, incessantly relapsing into rebellion, had embroiled the savages of Aethiopia. The number of the Blemmyes, scattered between the Island of Meroe and the Red Sea, was very inconsiderable, their disposition was unwarlike, their weapons rude and inoffensive. Yet in public disorders these barbarians, whom antiquity, shocked by the deformity of their figure,⁵⁷ had almost excluded from the human species, presumed to rank themselves among the enemies of Rome. Such had been the unworthy allies of the Egyptians; and while the attention of the state was engaged in more serious wars, their vexatious inroads might again harass the repose of the province. With a view to opposing to the Blemmyes a suitable adversary, Diocletian persuaded the Nobatae, or people of Nubia, to remove from their ancient habitations to the deserts of Libya, and resigned to them an extensive and unprofitable territory above the Syene and the cataracts of the Nile, with the stipulation that they should over respect and guard the frontier of the Empire. The treaty long subsisted. . .⁵⁸

Buddhist Appropriation of a Blemmya

Since Mela first couples the deformity of headlessness, etc., with the name ‘Blemyae’ and Strabo first reports that in former times Blemmyes and other Ethiopian tribes attacked unprotected peoples (Egyptians) ‘piratically,’ the acephalite identified by the Buddha as the executioner of Rājagaha in post-mortem torment may be dated in the first half of the first century B.C. True, details of the Blemmyae’s conflicts and alliances with the Roman empire prove that they subsequently improved on their notoriety;⁵⁹ but this does not bring down the period of

⁵⁷ Gibbon reads Mela’s and Pliny accounts into the later sources he uses.

⁵⁸ Nevertheless Prima, etc., yielded to them.

⁵⁹ S.A. Cook *et al.*, edd., *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 12 (A.D. 193–324), 173–174. L. Mussius Aemilianus, prefect of Egypt, emperor 257, drove back an invasion of the Blemmyae on the southern frontiers of Egypt. They invaded Egypt in the 3rd cent, and later (p. 277). They supported Firmus under Aurelian (p. 305). They supported Ptolemais in revolt (p. 316). Probus drove them out of Koptos in Ptolemais in 280. It seems they interested the Persians. On Diocletian see *New Encyclopedia Britannica*

Moggallāna's exchange with the Buddha concerning Hārika: robbery with violence connected the headless vision with an 'executioner'; and the mental connection on the Buddha's part would not be stimulated so well while Blemmyae were a well-organized political force.

The Buddhist train of thought which the exchange suggests may have been as follows: amongst the many races of people rumoured and reported to exist there are monsters (not least in India).⁶⁰ Few are of distinct paraenetic value; nevertheless the condition of all people reflects their moral history in previous births (India being no exception).⁶¹ The parasitized condition of the Nile Valley is an example: their lives must have earned this *talio*: punishment inflicted by the monstrous and degraded Blemmyae, whose own ancestors had been thieves and cut-throats, tormenting others. The Blemmyae themselves supply a pattern of post-mortem torment for any who are *hereditary* cut-throats. The Criminal Tribe (now "Scheduled Tribe") is an ancient institution of India, and no Indian would be surprised to find one in Africa (he would not need to mount a camel to verify its existence). Evidently none of the Blemmyae had received the Buddha's doctrine of 'freedom.' A professional killer must come from just such a stock. His personal ruthlessness would be a minor consideration, seeing that in India all degraded castes were hereditary (notoriously including the executioners who are *caṇḍālas*, who are the

vol. 20, 1990, 331 col. 2. Maximinus defeats Nobatae and Blemmyae in 451. M. Rostovzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2nd. edn., P.M. Frazer, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1957, repr. 1988, vol. i, 301, 305, 307, 464, 480, 486–487. R.T. Updegraff, "The Blemmyes I. . ." in *A.N.R.W.* II. 10,1, pp. 44–97.

⁶⁰ For example *cyclopes* (Homer, *Od* 9. 112–115), *cynacephali*, *enotoctoetai*, *sciapodes* (Aristoph., *Aves* 1553; Ctesias), *hippopodes*, *monoscelides*, *anthrophagi*. Cf. Strabo 15.1.57. Whereas the *sciapodes* derive from an Indian ascetic practice, *enotoctoetai* from Indian ideas of Beauty, and *monoscelides* from Śiva *ekapādēsvara*, many mostrosities derive from foetal malformations (*Enc. Brit.*, 11th edn., vol. 18, 742–743). But unexplored regions pullulate with dramatic monsters. Note the ridicule at Shakespeare, *Anthony & Cleopatra* Act II, scene vii, lines 34–50.

⁶¹ M i.22–23, trans., i.28–29; cf. M i.286, trans., i.344; A i.122–123, trans., i.105; i.249–253, trans., i.227–230; ii.202–205; iii.73,186,385; trans., iii.59,137,274.

lowest caste). Now headless creatures with eyes and mouth on their breasts were reputedly testified to by many over centuries! Such books proved that punitive headlessness was a fact even in the West! The Blemmyae's conditions of life were not far short of hellish, conforming to the Buddhist conception of delinquents released from hell but escaping animal-rebirth. And *were* the Blemmyae not on the *verge* of animal-rebirth anyhow?

All such creatures, within human imagination, exemplify what one should fear when one's sins have not been purged through the tortures of veritable hells.⁶² Greece and Rome can now be called to witness by such masters of insight as Moggallāna the Great. Greece and Rome substantiate his highly imaginative portion of Buddhist ethical doctrine. Just as the adopting of Greek motifs, like the Symplegades in the Devadatta story,⁶³ made Buddhist legend more accessible to the West, so these visions add plausibility to the fabulous magical powers⁶⁴ attributed to an adept of the calibre of that Moggallāna. Therefore the Rājagaha executioner permitted the Blemmyae and Moggallāna to authenticate each other.**

*The sections of the Sutta-piṭaka of the Pāli Tipiṭaka are indicated thus: A = Aṅguttara-nikāya; D = Dīgha-nikāya; M = Majjhima-nikāya; S = Saṃyutta-nikāya. The Pali Text Society's editions and translations

⁶² For examples of these see M iii.166–167, trans., iii.212–213; A i.141, trans., i.137; i.292–293, trans., i.270–271.

⁶³ Rocks spontaneously clashed and destroyed all but a splinter of the rock Devadatta rolled down onto the Buddha: S i.22–29, 110, trans., i.38–40, 138–139; Cullavagga VII.3,9 (SBE 20, 245), Fa-Hian, *Fo-kwo-ki* 29, S. Beal, *Si-yu-ki* (n. 10 above), pp. lix–lx.

⁶⁴ See n. 10 above. On *Iddhis* see A i.255, trans., i.233; Conze, *Scriptures* (n. 19 above), 121–133.

** For valuable references and materials I am obliged to Mr Neil Spencer and Mrs Rosalind Caird (both of Hereford), Dr Simon Lawson (Indian Institute Library, Oxford), Mr V.A. Donohue (Egyptologist), Mr. Roger Norris (Chapter Library, Durham) and especially to that outstanding philo-myth and philo-math, Mr Peter Drinkwater of Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire.

are used. From the particulars of the *text* the German and Italian translations, and others may easily be located.

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BOOK REVIEWS

PETER G. RIDDELL, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*—Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2001 (xvii + 349 p.) ISBN 0-8248-2473-3 (hb.) \$42.00.

Political changes in Indonesia during the last few years, the upcoming islamization in Malaysia or plans to establish an independent Islamic state in the Southern parts of the Philippines bring South East Asia to the news' headlines and to the general study of the Islamic world alike. Therefore a study of the history of Islam in the Malay-Indonesian world is highly welcome. The author calls our attention to the fact that Islam in these areas of South East Asia can be divided into two periods, the one from the early years of Islam in the Malay world from the 13rd century onwards, the other since the 20th century when Islamic thinkers—inspired by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh or Muhammad Iqbal—developed their thoughts with differences between theologians coming either from the Malayan peninsula or Indonesia.

The first chapters of the study provide the background by giving the outlines of Islamic thought—exegesis of the Qur'an, revelation, law and mysticism—in the Arab world (pp. 13-98), as there were no Islamic centres of learning in the Malay and Indonesian world for long. Islam in South East Asia was mainly dominated by shafaitic law then (p. 54 f.), but also legends of the prophet's life have been very important for the spread of Islam in these areas (p. 63 f.). Links between South East Asia and Gujarat at the western coast of India (p. 71) also brought Ibn al-Arabi's mysticism to the Malay world.

One of the first well known Islamic scholars is Hamzah Fanzuri who in the late 16th century travelled widely from the western coast of Sumatra to Siam and Arabia; he became acquainted with various mystical schools and was initiated into the Qadiriyya order. After returning to Sumatra, he and his later pupils did not only promote Sufism, but the idea of the "perfect man" also had an impact on the Malay idea of kingship (cf. p. 115). The preference for mystical Islam in the Malay world may also have been due to the legacy of Hindu mystical elements, and the court epic in the Malay era from the

14th to the 17th and 18th centuries therefore shows some influence from the Hindu and Buddhist past of South East Asia before the advent of Islam (cf. p. 144 f.). While the first centuries of Islamic thought in the Malay world owned a lot to mysticism, a change took place in the 19th century when contacts and social links between the Malay world and the Middle East were deepened, partly also because of rising immigration from South Arabia, mainly from Hadhramaut to South East Asia. This led to a challenge to and a decline of Sufi thinking (cf. p. 192 f.). Besides this shift, European colonialism also made a strong impression on the whole area, raising modernising voices among Islamic authors, some of them gaining heavy political influence, as it was the case with Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia or Abdurrahman Wahid in Indonesia during the last two decades (cf. pp. 241 f.). Though Islam in South East Asia is closely interconnected across the area, the 20th century brought differences between the Malay world (Malayan peninsula, Southern Thailand, Philippines) and Indonesia. The former became more closely connected to the Middle East, which is also expressed in contemporary culture through newspapers or television programmes (cf. pp. 309 f.).

As a conclusion one has to say that this book gives an excellent overview of the main Islamic thinkers in the Malay–Indonesian world during the last centuries focusing on their own contributions and their debt to other parts of the Muslim world. South East Asian Islam therefore deserves to be studied as a substantive part of the Islamic world within comparative religions, even the more as Indonesia is not only the largest political unit world-wide with the highest number of Muslim people living there but also because South East Asia is an area with rapidly growing Muslim populations.

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ROBERT KISALA, *Prophets of Peace: Pacifism and Cultural Identity in Japan's New Religions*—Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1999 (242 p.) ISBN 0-8248-2267-6, \$21.00.

Peace talk (or, in deference to current jargon, peace-discourse) is “in” these days, all the more enthusiastically as the desirable goal seems to be reced-

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ing farther away. Religions (i.e. religious organizations and their officials, bureaucracies and spokesmen—often referred to as ‘religious leaders’—as well as concerned and articulate individuals identifying with a particular religious tradition) are competing in their efforts to further the cause of peace, not least by means of international conferences, “religious summit” meetings (which often show religions at their most colourful and photogenic) and joint prayer gatherings. Sometimes these efforts take the form of less glamorous aid programmes to underdeveloped or disaster-stricken areas. Two assumptions are underlying these efforts. The first is that religions, at least at what is held to be their best, are not only committed to peace but should, and indeed could, significantly contribute to this ideal state since religion still has a decisive role to play in human affairs. The second assumption is that since peace, which in the first place means “peace between” past or present, actual or potential, contenders, concerns all “religionists,” concerted religious peace efforts imply interreligious (“interfaith”) collaboration and “Dialogue of World Religions” on various levels and to various degrees. The annual prayer gatherings for peace in Assisi initiated by Pope John Paul II in 1986, or the Museum of World Religions in Taipei, a Buddhist initiative designed to promote “world peace and religious harmony,” are random examples.

Mention has been made of the mandatory participation of official “representatives” at such events. Special interest attaches to cases when these representatives are the actual founders of “new religions” or their second-third-fourth generation (often less charismatic and more bureaucratic type) successors. New religious movements, revivals, foundations etc. are a universal phenomenon, yet 19th and 20th century Japan may well be called the land of rising new religions. Not all of the many hundreds have survived or merit closer analysis and description. And of the two or three dozen that do, not all relevant ones can be adequately discussed in a volume focusing on one particular albeit central theme: their ideological and practical commitment to peace or, more precisely, to pacifism. Most Japanese “new religions” are involved in a variety of peace activities as participants at conferences (Assisi, Milan), as initiators of such conferences and meetings (such as e.g. the Mount Hiei gathering), as sponsors of major interfaith-and-peace organizations (e.g. Rissho Koseikai and the “World Conference on Religion and Peace” [WCRP]), or as speakers at such internationally recognized forums as U.N. Assemblies (e.g. Soka Gakkai’s President Ikeda). Konkokyo too has its

“Peace Activity Centre.” Incidentally, such public and especially international activity is also status-enhancing for new “sects” that usually do not at first enjoy, to put it mildly, high prestige. Many new religions also demand more inward-directed “spiritual” activity and discipline: prayer, and above all “polishing” and purifying your soul and “pacifying” your immediate surroundings which includes not only husbands, wives, children and mothers-in-law, but also ancestral and diverse negative spirits. Peace must spread outward in concentric circles from individual to family, group, related spirits etc. until it permeates the whole world. This aspect of the matter is central especially to “new religions” that do not engage in spectacular public relations activities but, their missionary fervour notwithstanding, are rather closed in on themselves. The Prayer of the Tensho-Kotai-Jingu-Kyo (f. 1945; the group is not mentioned in the book under review) begins with “Peace in the World, Peace in the World” (*tenka taihei, tenka taihei*) and the prayer instructions specify “do not pray for favours and blessings. World peace is the ultimate goal.” In 1964 a “Temple of Peace” was dedicated at the main sanctuary. The interrelation of the various elements is nicely brought out in a sermon of the present leader of the sect: “Aspiring for world peace, our mission is to pray in total earnestness for peace and the redemption of negative spirits.” Even more explicit was the Foundress in her sermon of 13th September 1952: “People will fight and countries will wage war because of the influence of negative spirits.” This statement is undoubtedly meant to be taken literally. Believers “sacrificing themselves [in their earnest religious practice] for the sake of world peace” are reminded that “negative spirits are [the cause of] your negative thoughts.” It hardly needs pointing out that the idea of cleansing our spirits and polishing our souls current in so many of the new religions is simply the religious transformation of the traditional Confucian notion of “self-cultivation” (ch. *hsiu-shen*, j. *shūshin*) basic to Chinese as well as Japanese ethics.

The book under review covers much familiar ground for readers having some acquaintance with the Japanese *shinshukyo* and the phenomenological and chronological problems surrounding them (e.g. to what extent are terms such as new, new new, neo-new etc. useful). For the newcomer it can serve as an informative and helpful general introduction, providing a wealth of detail not generally accessible. The chief merit of the book, however, lies in its very specific focus. It is in his close analysis, supported by interviews and questionnaires, of the varieties of pacifism *stricto sensu* advocated by these

groups as distinct from their more general concern for the advancement of peace that the author wants to break new ground. Strict pacifism is equated with absolute and uncompromising Gandhi-like commitment to non-violence and we thus get a simple and rather mechanical scale for measuring pacifisms. The German plotters unsuccessfully trying to assassinate Hitler very clearly were no pacifists. The political implications are clear. What attitude should Japan adopt on such questions as Defence Forces, international alliances, collaboration with U.N. military interventions? But the author's probings go much further. If the "Word of God" (i.e. the gospel of peace and other "universal" messages of world salvation) does not go forth from Zion and Jerusalem, nor from Mecca or Sarnath for that matter, but from Japan where it is revealed in the Japanese language by Japanese mouthpieces of the divine, then the matter raises questions as to Japan's role in the *heilsgeschichtliche* scheme of things. The subtitle of Robert Kisala's study "Cultural Identity in Japan's New Religions" could well have served as its main title. (The connection of the problem of particular "identity" and universal peace-message was already clearly formulated by Michael Pye in the title of his 1985 paper "National and International Identity in a Japanese Religion"—to wit the Byakko Shinkokai discussed at length also by Kisala).

Clear and distinct ideas have never been the forte of Japanese discourse. Richard Storry even spoke of the Japanese "cult of the inarticulate." But there is a vast difference between culturally canonized and meaningful, one might even say 'articulate,' vagueness and sheer confusion. The debate about pacifism in Japan generally (and not only in the New Religions) is characterized, as the author rightly points out, by misunderstandings and confusion galore. No doubt "much harm has been done in the name of justice"—as also much injustice has been done in the name of peace. A writer identifying himself as a Catholic priest should have been aware of the extent to which the work of the Pontifical Commission IUSTITIA ET PAX has been bedevilled between the horns of this dilemma. At any rate when making comparisons with the West, instances of more sophisticated and dialectical modern discourse on pacifism = non-violence (e.g. Reinhold Niebuhr) could have been presented rather than the antiquated and by now quaintly anachronistic notion of "just war." In spite of some irrelevant material, at least in the eyes of one reader (e.g. the author's *Confessiones*-style account of how he came to be personally involved with, and committed

to, his subject), this highly instructive book should be found helpful also by Japanese readers desirous of de-confusion.

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PAUL R. KATZ, *Images of the Immortal: The Cult of Lü Dongbin at the Palace of Immortal Joy*—Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1999 (xvi + 309 p.) ISBN 0-8248-2170-X, \$54.00.

This is a book written by a sinologist for sinologists and there is no need to recommend it to them. It is, however, also a book that ought to be read by non-sinologists because it is a model of what a certain type of research can and should do. Not everybody is necessarily interested in the Chinese notion of “immortals” (*xian*)—a sort of Daoist analogue to what elsewhere would be called “saints”—or in the ante-mortem as well as post-mortem biography of Lü Dongbin, perhaps the most complex and picturesque figure in the classical group of the “Eight Immortals.” And not everybody will be interested in that outstanding example of Chinese religious construction and art, the temple, or rather “cult site,” known as the “Palace of Eternal Joy” (*Yongle Gong*), dedicated to the cult of the aforementioned Lü Dongbin. The entire temple complex with its buildings, inscribed stelae and, above all, frescoes, is fortunately preserved as it was moved *in toto* (around 1960) from its original site to its present location to make place for a dam construction project. (Unlike the analogous Luxor operation, this displacement was carried out not by UNESCO but by the Chinese government itself!). Katz’s book is so far the most thorough study of its subject and few details have escaped the author’s attention. One example may suffice here. The index of the magnificent 415 p. folio-size Daoism catalogue published in connection with the exhibition held in 2000–2001 at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco has over a dozen references to Lü and even more to the Huizong emperor (a fervent Daoist though a very dubious one, at least from the “Perfect Realization” point of view), but no mention is made of their encounter. The story and the murals illustrating it are discussed by Katz.

But beyond *chinoiseries* the subject of cult-sites as such, their origins and history, their connection with particular cult-figures, and the factors shaping these connections increasingly command the attention of students of religion. When and how is a site sacralized more specifically by appropriating a saint and, on the other hand, what makes a cult figure popular and significant enough to become attached to a particular cult-site? Who exactly and what interest-groups (officials, literati, local elites, merchant classes, popular devotion often representing and implicitly defining folk-identities) do this appropriating and attaching, and what induces them to do so? Are there serial appropriations (e.g., when the *Yongle Gong* and the cult of Lü were taken over by the “Perfect Realization” school or sect of Daoism)? And does a shrine (or, for that matter, the saint worshipped there) have identical meanings for all its sponsors, patrons and devotees? Much as the same or similar legends are told of different heroes (saints, immortals, deified beings), the same personality can be surrounded by a variety of different and even incompatible legends, possibly serving different purposes and interests. These are questions of very general application but they are best tackled by careful examination of particular instances. This is exactly what this two-in-one monograph on a Daoist Immortal (Lü Dongbin) and his cult site (the *Yongle Gong*) is doing. And that is why it should be found also on non-sinological bookshelves.

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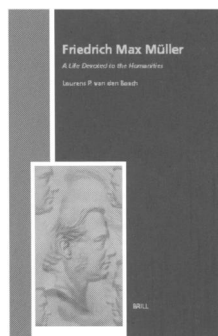
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